

103
VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

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Violence in Video Games, Serial No....

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND FINANCE
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED THIRD CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JUNE 30, 1994

Serial No. 103-124

Printed for the use of the Committee on Energy and Commerce



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
CONGRESSIONAL SALES OFFICE

NOV 2 1994

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
CONGRESSIONAL SALES OFFICE

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

83-286CC

WASHINGTON : 1994

For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents, Congressional Sales Office, Washington, DC 20402
ISBN 0-16-045912-5

Y 4.EN 2/3:103-124

For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents, Congressional Sales Office, Washington, DC 20402
ISBN 0-16-045912-5

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VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

THURSDAY, JUNE 30, 1994

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND FINANCE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:18 a.m., in room 2322, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward J. Markey (chairman) presiding.

Mr. MARKEY. Good morning and welcome to the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance. Our hearing is on violence in video games, ratings and blocking technology.

Conservative growth estimates suggest that the game industry will double in the next few years, soon reaching \$15 billion annually. Nintendo imports alone made up nearly 10 percent of the U.S. trade deficit with Japan in 1993.

I will say that again. Nintendo imports alone made up nearly 10 percent of the U.S. trade deficit with Japan in 1993.

Four out of ten U.S. households have Sega or Nintendo systems according to a recent Newsday report. This phenomenal growth will only increase as these industries gain access to the information superhighway and the opportunities it brings.

On Tuesday, the House resoundingly passed legislation crafted by this committee to spur the development of the information superhighway and to encourage the communications revolution. There is great promise in the technology that will increase opportunities for learning, for work, for communication and for pure entertainment.

These advances in technology will make it possible for a 12-year-old to retrieve the Grapes of Wrath with a click of a mouse from the Library of Congress. That same technology will allow him to download Mortal Kombat with his remote control without having to lie about his age or ask in person at a video store.

These developments, which this subcommittee has encouraged, require us to take a careful look at what this can mean for parents trying to raise children in a violent world. There have been hundreds of scientific studies over the past 3 decades documenting the effects of media violence on children. Numerous public health groups, professional organizations and government agencies have reviewed these studies independently and come to the same conclusion: Media violence contributes to the problems of violence and aggression in our society.

Games that have been criticized for excessive violence will soon be available over cable systems and eventually over the phone sys-

tem and other communications networks. Just as the technological developments that enable a game to portray graphic death scenes have led to plans for a rating system, technological advances that will bring these games directly into people's living rooms by way of cable or phone systems underscore the need for finding ways to strengthen the ability of caregivers to protect young children from excessive and gratuitous video violence. That is why we are here today.

[The prepared statements of Mr. Markey and Mr. Fields follow:]

STATEMENT OF EDWARD J. MARKEY

Good morning and welcome to the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance oversight hearing on violence in video games, ratings, and blocking technology.

Conservative growth estimates suggest that the game industry will double in the next few years, soon reaching \$15 billion dollars annually. Nintendo imports alone made up nearly 10 percent of the U.S. trade deficit with Japan in 1993. Four out of ten U.S. households have a Sega or Nintendo system according to a recent *Newsday* report. This phenomenal growth will only increase as these industries gain access to the information superhighway and the opportunities it brings.

On Tuesday, the House resoundingly passed legislation crafted by this committee to spur the development of the information superhighway and to encourage the communications revolution. There is great promise in the technology that will increase opportunities for learning, for work, for communication, and for pure entertainment. Because we are in the early stages of building the superhighway, we are in a unique position to build in the tools that parents need to address this situation.

Advances in technology will make it possible for a 12-year-old to retrieve *The Grapes of Wrath* with the click of a mouse from the Library of Congress. That same technology will allow him to download *Mortal Kombat* with his remote control without having to lie about his age or ask in person at a video store.

These developments, which this subcommittee has encouraged, require us to take a careful look at what this can mean for parents trying to raise children in a violent world. There have been hundreds of scientific studies over the last 3 decades documenting the effects of media violence on children. Numerous public health groups, professional organizations, and government agencies have reviewed these studies *independently* and have come to the same conclusion: Media violence contributes to the problems of violence and aggression in our society.

Games that have been criticized for excessive violence will soon be available over cable systems and eventually over the phone system and other communications networks. Just as the technological developments that enable a game to portray graphic death scenes have led to plans for a rating system, technological advances that will bring these games directly into people's living rooms via the cable or phone system underscore the need for finding ways to strengthen the ability of caregivers to protect young children from excessive, gratuitous and voluminous video violence.

Parents have the right to supervise their children and to make decisions about what toys and activities are appropriate. This includes the ability to control what comes into their living rooms, often without their knowledge or consent. It is unreasonable to believe that in the future parents will be able to supervise hundreds of channels and interactive games. We no longer live in a world in which kids go home to Mom and a bowl of tomato soup for lunch.

I would like to take the opportunity this morning to applaud the progress made by the video game and software industries in addressing the problem of violence in the entertainment media. They join the cable industry and the satellite industry in making a responsible commitment to this Nation's parents to help them to choose what their children watch. The tremendous progress they have made with a rating system has occurred in less than a year.

After decades of parental concern, Congressional hearings, and public health warnings, the broadcast industry yesterday announced a plan to conduct an annual report on violence on their networks. This is a very positive step. But an annual report does not help parents control day-to-day television viewing for their young children.

The television set manufacturers are also prepared to participate in providing parents with the ability to block violent programs. They are hoping to build into TV sets the "V-chip" blocking capability that has been proposed in H.R. 2888 by myself, Representative Fields, and many other members. Their voluntary efforts to address

this issue are being opposed by the broadcast industry. I am hopeful that their proposal succeeds.

It is just this kind of voluntary, good faith effort that is the best answer to public concern surrounding these issues. If the V-chip can be built into sets voluntarily, parents will have access to this technology far more quickly than if we had to pass legislation.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel who have spent a great deal of time and energy on this important issue.

STATEMENT OF HON. JACK FIELDS

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your holding this oversight hearing on video game violence. Previously, we have had a series of hearings on excessive violence in television. As video games begin to be distributed via mass media, it is appropriate that we hold this hearing today.

We have seen a dramatic change in the complexity of video games over the years as technology has improved. Video games have advanced from crudely drawn animated figures to more realistic figures capable of performing a variety of actions—including, unfortunately in some instances, murdering and disfiguring other video characters. My son, Josh, spends many hours playing these video games and as the games are made available on cable, I can expect he will spend even more time before the television.

With the potential of more children being exposed to video games on the broadcast channels and cable parents need to be provided with adequate information about games that they may consider unsuitable for their children, and parents need to be able to prevent their children from having access to those games which are inappropriate.

Mr. Chairman, I want to commend your leadership in addressing the issue of violence in the media. I am convinced that largely due to your efforts, the broadcast and cable industry has responded so positively to the challenge to protect our children against exposure to excessive violence on television. The latest evidence of this response is yesterday's announcement by the four networks to appoint an independent program monitor, the UCLA Center for Communications Policy, to review their programming over the next two television seasons. This, together with the cable industry's recent appointment of Mediascope to review cable programming, indicates the television industry's strong commitment to addressing the violence issue.

I would also like to commend the video game industry for creating an industry wide ratings system. This rating system will cover more than 2,500 interactive software titles annually. I hope we will see the ratings system in place soon. I am interested to hear how the industry will assist parents during the implementation period of the ratings system.

Again, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to the testimony of today's panel.

Mr. MARKEY. We have a distinguished group of guests who will be testifying, and we look forward to their testimony.

Let me turn and recognize the gentlelady from California, Ms. Schenk.

Ms. SCHENK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this hearing.

And particularly I want to note the presence of our very good friend, Congressman Lantos. We use the word good friend here a lot, but it has special meaning for me with Congressman Lantos.

Today's hearing is a step in the right direction in our subcommittee's oversight of violent entertainment, and it is an important step. Video games have become as important a force in the lives of our children as cable or broadcast television.

Tomorrow's entertainment universe will offer children not only video on demand but video games on demand. And we should view violent video games with the same concern and the same urgency that we view violent TV programming. Today, parents need our help to decipher the differences between hundreds of video game titles.

It is crucial that parents have one consistent set of standards or ratings for computer software, for Sega games, for Nintendo and for all the others. It is crucial that we have an independent body that develops and evaluates these standards in the best interests of parents and children, not industry.

I know that graphic video games such as Night Trap and Mortal Kombat are at this point the exception and not the rule, but we have to be proactive to make sure that they don't become the rule. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and with the industry to ensure that these efforts continue with some amount of urgency.

And I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MARKEY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

We will turn to Congressman Tom Lantos who is the sponsor of the lead legislation here in the House of Representatives on this issue. And we appreciate the fact that you are willing to come here and testify today, Tom. Whenever you are ready, please begin.

STATEMENT OF HON. TOM LANTOS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congresswoman Schenk. I am delighted to be here.

At the outset, I want to commend you for your enormous contributions toward making our society more civilized because that is basically what we are dealing with. Some view your V-chip legislation as a technological fix. It is far more than a technological fix. It is a significant step in the direction of turning this society of increasing violence, sadism, blood, mayhem, into a somewhat more civilized society. I want to salute you, and I want to tell you that I am delighted to cosponsor that legislation.

We need, of course, not just a technological fix but a judgmental fix. And that is where the legislation of Senator Lieberman, Senator Kohl, in the other body and my legislation in the House, H.R. 3785, steps in.

I must begin with a personal confession. I am not a great player of interactive video games because I am part of the generation that grew up on chess. And while chess may be less—

Mr. MARKEY. But not in the United States.

Mr. LANTOS [continuing]. —Less visually exciting, it has in many ways some intellectual challenge attached to it, and I don't regret being part of the chess generation.

But being the proud grandfather of 15 grandchildren, it came to me as a personal shock as I was visiting with some of them that a friend had given them one of these nightmare games. And these otherwise marvelous little children were relishing the degree of sadism and torture that they could engage in. And I decided that it was both a professional and a personal responsibility to do something about it, which accounts for my involvement in this issue.

I think it is important to realize, Mr. Chairman, that torture, sadism and violence have existed long before this industry was born—from Chinese water torture to the Marquis de Sade and Dracula in my own native country. And we have a long and undistinguished record of creativity in terms of portraying horror to one another.

And I suspect that at a time when our daily papers are filled with everything from drive-by shootings to the nightmare of Bosnia and Schindler's List, it is important to realize that we have an enormous pedagogic responsibility to bring judgment to bear on what is available to children.

And here I must say that, in my view, the particular platform is utterly secondary. Whether a parent picks up a cassette and takes it home to play or whether this comes directly via cable or by television or by any other mechanical device is a very secondary aspect of this matter. It is the substance we are dealing with.

I think it is fair to say that a portion of the industry deserves a great deal of credit for working with us in attempting to establish an independent rating commission. It is our hope, the hope of Senator Lieberman, myself and others who are involved with H.R. 3785 on the House side, that the industry itself will develop a credible and independent ratings system that will do the job.

And our legislation, as you know, Mr. Chairman, has a built-in sunset provision. We go out of business if the industry does this, and that is our hope.

I would be less than candid with you if I did not report that segments of the industry are wholly uncooperative, and we are determined to take whatever steps are necessary—blocking their marketing capabilities or whatever other legal means that might be at our disposal, nationwide boycotts by parent-teacher organizations, teacher organizations, school boards and others—to see to it that this nightmare is not allowed to penetrate the consciousness of the upcoming generation.

I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have. And I want to commend, again, you and Congressman Schenk for the outstanding leadership you have provided.

Mr. MARKEY. Well, could you tell us who is not being cooperative? Where do you see the problem in this industry?

Mr. LANTOS. Well, basically—and I don't want to generalize, but I think this generalization is as close to being accurate as generalizations are—the major and responsible players in the industry seem to be cooperative and want to resolve the issue without governmental interference, which is our hope, and establish a bona fide, substantive, independent rating commission that will provide parents with an opportunity to exercise their judgment.

There are large numbers of smaller and independent operators who, for a variety of reasons, some of them in my judgment utterly synthetic, claim that it would place too large a burden on them to move along these lines and so far have refused to cooperate.

As you know, Senator Lieberman is scheduling a hearing for early next month, middle of next month, and we hope to be able to meet this issue head on.

I just would like to say, Mr. Chairman, we are determined to deal with the issue without any loopholes. The final product, the minds of our children, is far too precious to allow recalcitrant entrepreneurs to block our efforts.

Mr. MARKEY. So you would think that legislation is necessary unless we could be sure that we were capturing all the recalcitrant participants?

Mr. LANTOS. I am convinced that legislation is necessary. The legislation that we are sponsoring is sort of a two-stage legislation. It calls for the establishment of an independent rating commission, and, hopefully, this will be industry-provided, industry-supplied, industry-funded. And will do the job. If it doesn't, we have to take additional steps, because defeat cannot be allowed in this arena.

Mr. MARKEY. One of the concerns that we have on this subcommittee is that, from broadcasting to movies in theaters to the cable industry to video game makers to software manufacturers, there is no common sense of what a standard ratings system should look like. No rating that parents could rely upon, that they would see on any product to mean something, as we now try to do with food or with other consumer products.

Can you give us your views on that with regard to how we could synthesize, perhaps, the efforts that are taking place across all of these various technologies?

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Chairman, the problem of not being able to agree on a common system of rating is not an intellectual problem. It is clearly an attempt by segments of the industry to escape any and all participation in any other entity except their profit-seeking motive in determining what our children see and what games our children or grandchildren play with.

This is clearly not a task which is beyond our intellectual capability. As a matter of fact, my mention of Schindler's List, for instance, very clearly indicates that the issue cannot be either technological or mechanical. There is an enormous amount of mayhem and bloodbath in Schindler's List, yet it is my hope that the film will be seen by every teenager in this country as a pedagogic device.

We are not dealing with a mechanistic notion of what is violence. Violence must be put in a context where the portrayal of violence serves a useful educational function. The portrayal of violence can play an extremely important social constructive role. It is inconceivable to me that those segments of the industry which are dragging their feet and are opposing our legislation claim for a moment that it is impossible to rate their product. They simply don't want any rating.

And as the tobacco industry has been discovering lately and a number of other purveyors of undesirable products, physical or intellectual or mental or psychological, the public won't stand for this.

So my hope is that as we move along in the next few weeks and months we will have total industry cooperation. If we won't, we will not be deterred to take whatever legal steps are at our disposal, whatever commercial pressure is at our disposal, whatever embarrassing public exposure is at our disposal to deal with it.

Let me just mention one specific example of how this works.

Earlier on, I was chairman of a subcommittee with oversight on OSHA, and one of the topics that I became fascinated by is the persistence of child labor at the end of the 20th century. We attempted to deal with the worst violators of child labor on the basis of persuasion, and we failed.

Then we had a nationally televised hearing during the course of which a beautiful woman testified with tears in her eyes that her

only 15-year-old boy was killed trying to deliver Domino's Pizza under the 30-minute deadline on a wet and slippery road. Now, the negative publicity that Domino's Pizza received across this land by showing that their mindless pursuit of their commercial interests results in the death of a child was vastly more effective—because they changed their policies—than anything else we tried before. So we will go the route of exposure.

We have been in touch with various organizations that deal with children across the board. Clearly, as you will hear later today, I believe from the American Medical Association, psychologists, people who deal with children day in and day out, fully understand not only that children are desensitized as they see and are part of this endless avalanche of mayhem, but, the way many of these games are devised, you are rewarded the better sadist you are.

I mean, what more horrible lesson to teach a child than that to win you have to succeed in torturing and killing and mutilating more effectively? I can't conceive of anything more counter-productive for the development of a civilized society.

Mr. MARKEY. Let me recognize now the gentlelady from California.

Ms. SCHENK. Thank you. I don't have any further questions. It was an eloquent and profound presentation.

Mr. MARKEY. Let me focus on one issue. It is at the nub of all of the controversy. And Schindler's List is probably a good illustration of it. You said that every teenager should see it. What about every 7-year-old?

Mr. LANTOS. I don't think any 7-year-old should see it, and I take as my guide the extremely intelligent layout of the Holocaust Memorial Museum where, as you know, the most horrendous exhibits are displayed behind barriers that are tall enough so that parents who are walking with their children are able to see it, but the children are not able to see it.

As a matter of fact, it took me a great deal of soul searching to decide at what level I should cut off the viewing of Schindler's List by my grandchildren, and I took my three oldest with me who were old enough. While it was a horrid experience for them, it was an enormously valuable experience for them. I would never dream of taking smaller ones because they would not understand the context. They would only understand the bloodbath.

But this is, of course, where what I referred to as the judgmental fix that is needed, because the technological fix gives us the capability to do whatever we want to do. But it is clearly the judgmental arena where we have to make the basic decisions.

Mr. MARKEY. Well, thank you. Do you have any other questions?

Ms. SCHENK. No.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Congresswoman Schenk. Have a good break.

Mr. MARKEY. We will now move to our second panel, if they could please move up to the witness table.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Thomas, you are the president and chief executive officer of the Sega Channel. If you would move the microphone over, please. We thank you very much for coming here today. Whenever you feel comfortable please begin.

STATEMENTS OF STANLEY THOMAS, PRESIDENT, SEGA CHANNEL; MARCY KELLY, PRESIDENT, MEDIASCOPE; DOUGLAS LOWENSTEIN, PRESIDENT, INTERACTIVE DIGITAL SOFTWARE ASSOCIATION; AND ROBERT E. McAFEE, PRESIDENT-ELECT, AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am delighted to be here. I applaud you on your leadership for H.R. 3636. The cable industry and others think that is a very important element of our movement toward the information superhighway. Our congratulations to you.

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, my name is Stan Thomas, and I am the president and chief executive officer of the Sega Channel. I am pleased to be here to talk to you about our new service and, in particular, our Password for Parents program.

The Sega Channel is the cable TV industry's first truly interactive service, providing video games on demand 24 hours a day. The channel is a partnership of three entertainment leaders, Sega of America, Incorporated, Tele-Communications, Incorporated—TCI—and Time Warner. I am pleased to be here today with the support and the encouragement of all three partner companies.

Sega Channel service began on a pilot basis—on a test basis earlier this month. By mid-July, the channel will be available to more than 325,000 cable subscribers in a total of 12 test markets. We expect to roll out the service nationally late in 1994. The channel provides a tremendous entertainment opportunity for the entire family. Each month, our subscribers can choose from a library of 50 video games developed for the Sega Genesis game system. Those games include Sonic the Hedgehog, arcade games, action games, sports games and puzzle and problem-solving games.

Sega Channel offers video game entertainment appropriate for a wide range of age groups, of interests and tastes. As you know, video game players come in all ages, shapes and sizes, and we want the channel to meet the needs of all of those players just as a newsstand meets the needs of a broad cross-section of the community.

Recognizing this diversity, Sega, one of our partner companies, was the first company to develop a ratings system to ensure that parents have the information they need to determine whether a particular game is appropriate for their children.

Sega's Video Rating Council, a group of educators and child psychologists and other experts, review each Sega game for age appropriateness and designates each game with one of three ratings. The 50 video games initially selected by the Sega Channel for our test are all rated each GA or MA-13.

If you would please look to the video screens I will briefly try to illustrate these rating categories. The GA category signifies that the game is appropriate for general audiences. Examples are Barney, a familiar child's game, and Joe Montana football, a popular sports game.

There you see Barney.

There is Joe Montana football.

Many of our games, Mr. Chairman, are sports games which are generally all GA.

The MA-13 category signifies that parental guidance is suggested. These are games that are deemed appropriate for teenage

audiences. Most of Sega's fighting games such as Fatal Fury on the screen now are in this category.

We have incorporated these ratings in our Sega Channel service in a way that permits parents to monitor their children's game play and let me explain.

To use the Sega Channel, the cable subscriber must have a Sega Genesis system—the same system that plays the familiar Sega cartridges. The subscriber must also have a Sega Channel adapter, which the cable operator provides. The adapter comes with a welcoming kit which you have a copy of in front of you. I think I may have one here too, Mr. Chairman. This is the welcoming kit.

To use the channel, the cable subscriber must have a Sega Genesis machine, as I said before, the same system that plays the cartridges, and the subscriber must also have an adapter. And the welcoming kit includes a double-page spread that describes our Password for Parents program, and that is right here, Mr. Chairman, in your book.

The guide provides an opportunity for the parent with this double-page spread to describe the Password for Parents system and guides the parent through the use of the system.

Here is how the Password for Parents program works. First, the parent turns on the adapter. The parent calls up the Password for Parents PIN screen by pushing two buttons on the controller pad. The parent chooses and enters a PIN number known only to them. When this is completed, the ratings system pops up, and, using the control pad, the parent selects the level of game ratings appropriate for their household.

That is the menu, Mr. Chairman, that you see there. That is a classic screen. It shows exactly what the rating is.

And now you can see that the screen has been blocked out because the parent has said we don't want that particular level of game to be able to be played.

From that point on, the ratings screen can only be called up, and the category of permitted games can only be changed by someone using the PIN number, and the PIN number can only be changed by someone who knows and enters the secret PIN number entered by the parent.

Now let's see what happens if a child attempts to access the game. You saw that they didn't have access to anything over a GA.

Where are we on the tape, here?

The parent can reset the ratings levels at any time. So if a parent wants to play a game appropriate only for adults, they can enter their PIN number, change the ratings screen and then load that game for play. When they are finished, they can again enter their PIN number, change the ratings screen and reset the ratings levels as appropriate.

All in all, assessing the ratings screen and setting the ratings information is as easy as interacting with an automatic teller machine or a cable remote control, and it only takes a few seconds.

As I mentioned, our national rollout of the channel will take place later this year. We will begin shipping new adapters in October or November.

When the Interactive Digital Software Association begins to implement the uniform industry-wide video game ratings system de-

scribed later today by Mr. Lowenstein, we will modify our ratings scheme to recognize these new ratings, whatever they may be.

We are also adding a feature that permits parents to monitor and control the amount of time their children spend playing video games.

At Sega Channel we believe that technology should be used to give consumers more choices and more control. We have made our Password for Parents system easy for parents to use and impossible for children to defeat so long as the parent doesn't share the secret PIN number with them.

This technology will give parents the tools they need to exercise responsible choices. It will also allow the Sega Channel to meet the needs of game players of all ages without unnecessary censorship of game content.

We are pleased with to share our success with you today. Thank you for your attention, Mr. Chairman. And, obviously, we are delighted to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thomas follows:]

STATEMENT OF STANLEY B. THOMAS

Chairman Markey, members of the subcommittee: My name is Stanley B. Thomas, and I am president and chief executive officer of the Sega Channel.

I am pleased to be here at your request to provide more information about the Sega Channel. In particular, I will discuss our use of technology that gives parents the ability to monitor the kinds of video games their children play through our "Password for Parents" program.

The Sega Channel is the cable television industry's first truly interactive service, providing video games on-demand 24 hours a day to U.S. cable households.

The Sega Channel concept was developed by three entertainment leaders—Sega of America, Inc., Tele-Communications, Inc. (TCI) and Time Warner Entertainment Company, L.P. I am pleased to be here today with the support and encouragement of all three partner companies.

On June 6, the Sega Channel began cable service on a pilot basis in Charleston, West Virginia. By mid-July, the Channel will be available to more than 325,000 cable subscribers in a total of 12 test markets. We expect to roll out service nationally by late 1994.

We believe the Sega Channel provides a tremendous entertainment opportunity for the whole family. Each month, Sega Channel subscribers can choose from a library of 50 interactive video games developed for the Sega Genesis game system. Those games include classics such as "Sonic The Hedgehog", arcade games, action games, sports games, and puzzle and problem-solving games.

The Sega Channel will offer videogame entertainment appropriate for a wide range of age groups, interests, and tastes. As you know, videogame players come in all ages, shapes and sizes. We want the Sega Channel to meet the needs of all game players, just as a newsstand meets the needs of a broad cross-section of the community.

Recognizing this diversity, Sega was the first company to develop a ratings system to ensure that parents had the information they need to determine whether a particular videogame is age-appropriate for their children.

The Sega videogame rating system has three ratings categories:

- GA: Appropriate for general audiences.
- MA-13: Parental guidance suggested. Appropriate for teenage audiences.
- MA-17: Not appropriate for children. For adults only.

In developing the Sega Channel, we have incorporated these ratings into our system, as I will describe to you in a few moments.

To use the Sega Channel, the cable subscriber must have a Sega Genesis system—the same system that plays the familiar Sega game cartridges. The subscriber must also have a Sega Channel Adapter, provided by the local cable operator. The Adapter, in turn, is connected directly to the incoming cable line using a signal splitter.

Each Sega Channel subscriber receives a Welcome Kit and Instruction Guide with their Adapter. The Kit instructs the parents how to connect the Adapter to their cable system and to their Genesis unit. The Welcome Kit also includes a double-page spread describing the Password for Parents program and instructing the parent on how to set or reset the game ratings to which access will be permitted.

When a Sega Channel subscriber wants to play a game offered on the Channel, he or she turns on the Genesis unit, and a menu screen pops up on the TV screen. Each game on the menu is accompanied by its game rating: GA, MA-13 or MA-17. The subscriber selects the game he or she wants to play. That game is downloaded through the cable and stored in memory chips located in the Adapter. The subscriber can then play the game on his or her home screen. The game remains stored in the Adapter's memory for a period of time, or until the subscriber chooses a new game from the Sega Channel, at which time the new game overwrites the old game in the Adapter's memory.

Now let me describe how the parent uses the "Password for Parents" feature.

When the Sega Channel Adapter is shipped, it is set up for an "open rating", that is, it will permit games of all ratings to be received in the home. The parent can change this to a closed-end rating, and can lock in his or her choice using a secret PIN number.

First, the parent inserts the Adapter in the Genesis unit, and turns on the TV and the Genesis. Using the Control Pad, the parent calls up the "Password for Parents PIN Screen." The first time the parent accesses the screen, they must choose and enter their personal PIN number.

When this is completed, the "Rating Selection Screen" appears. Using the Control Pad, the parent selects which level of game ratings is appropriate for his her household—only games rated GA, only games rated GA or MA-13, or all games.

From that point on, the "Ratings" screen can only be called up—and the categories of permitted games can only be changed—by someone using that PIN number. And the PIN number can only be changed by someone who knows and enters, the secret PIN number originally selected by the parent.

The system is flexible. The parent can reset the "Ratings" levels at any time. For example, if an adult family member wants to play a game rated MA-17, they can enter their PIN number, change the "Ratings" screen, and then load that game for play. When they are finished, they can again enter their PIN number, change the "Ratings" screen, and reset the ratings levels as appropriate.

All in all, accessing the "Ratings" screen and setting the ratings information is as easy as interacting with an automatic teller machine or a cable remote control. And it takes only a few seconds.

When the parent makes these selections, he or she is interacting with the P-ROM (permanent read-only memory) chip inside the Adapter. By taking the steps I have described, they have instructed the Adapter which games—by rating—are to be permitted into the home.

The datastream that carries each videogame through the cable system and into the Adapter contains information on the game's rating. Any game that bears a rating other than that permitted by the parent cannot be downloaded into the Adapter.

Now, let's say that a parent has instructed the Adapter to permit only GA games into his or her home. If his or her child attempts to access a game rated MA-13 or MA-17, a message will pop up on the screen reminding them they are not authorized to access the game, and they will be returned to the game menu to find another game at a ratings level permitted by their parents.

Let me stress that the "Password for Parents" program is built into every Sega Channel Adapter. The parent does not have to make a special request for this service, nor is there any additional charge for this service. And the feature is controlled by the parent in the home, not at the cable headend.

As I noted earlier, our Adapters have been programmed during the Sega Channel's pilot phase to recognize the three ratings categories—GA, MA-13, and MA-17—currently used by the Sega Videogame Ratings Council.

Our national roll-out of the Sega Channel will not take place until late this year. We will begin shipping Adapters sometime next October or November. If—as we assume—the Interactive Digital Software Association's (IDSA) uniform, industry-wide videogame ratings system has been finalized in advance of our shipping date, we will modify the code in our Adapter chips to recognize these new ratings.

I am also pleased to announce that we will be including a feature in those new Adapters that permits a parent to block out all video games from downloading during specific time periods, so that parents can monitor and control the amount of time their children spend playing video games.

At the Sega Channel, we believe that technology should be used to give consumers more choices and more control.

We have made our Password for Parents system easy for parents to use and impossible for children to defeat—so long as the parent does not share the secret PIN number with them.

We believe that this technology will give parents the tools they need to exercise responsible choices. It will also allow the Sega Channel to meet the needs of game players of all ages without unnecessary censorship of game content.

Sega's experience with its Sega Genesis and Sega CD platforms shows that a very large percentage of game players are 18 or older. Creative minds are at work developing software intended for these mature audiences. Our approach puts into proper balance the parental interest in providing guidance to their children and the interest of older game players in having access to material appropriate for them.

We believe that the Sega Channel establishes an excellent model that can be adapted for interactive media in the future. We are pleased to share our success with you today.

Thank you.

Mr. MARKEY. Our next witness is Marcy Kelly, who is the president of Mediascope, here from California.

STATEMENT OF MARCY KELLY

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. Good morning and thank you, Chairman Markey and members of the subcommittee, for this opportunity to speak on the subject of interactive video games.

In the last decade, these games have emerged as one of the most popular forms of entertainment, particularly among adolescents. Americans spend more money on these games every year than they spend going to the movies.

The interactive video game industry is to be praised for their willingness to institute a rating system. Ratings are needed to help parents and children make informed purchasing decisions and viewing decisions and, in the long run, I believe it will also be beneficial to manufacturers.

Interestingly, with the creation of the video game ratings and the recently announced agreement of the television industry to provide ratings and/or advisories, virtually all entertainment outlets—including movies, music, home video stores—will soon have developed some voluntary system to inform consumers about content.

Video games are now played in 42 percent of American homes, and, as you pointed out earlier, the numbers continue to grow. Boys 8 to 14 are the core audience. And they are five times more likely to own a genesis or Super Nintendo system than girls.

In addition, a survey of the 47 top-rated video games found that 115 of the characters portrayed on the covers were male and only 9 were female. When women are depicted in games, 1/3 of the time it is in scenarios in which they are kidnapped or have to be rescued. Clearly, there is little incentive for, or reasons to encourage, girls to purchase video games.

The newest form of entertainment for children seems to have a disproportionate percentage of games that depend on violence. We also know that children appear to be developing a strong taste for violent entertainment. A 1993 study, which asked 7th and 8th graders to identify their preferences, found that 49 percent preferred violent games, 29 percent liked sports and 20 favored general entertainment and 2 percent educational games.

Another study of 6th grade boys who play violent games found that they had increased negative beliefs about their own academic ability, behavior and peer acceptance.

While I am able to cite some research on video games, the fact is that there are very few studies. Social science research on video games today is probably equivalent to our knowledge of television in 1947. There is much to learn, and I think it is important that every effort be made to encourage and provide incentives for the interactive game industry to work closely with experts in child development and social science research. Through such a collaboration, we could learn more about the short- and long-term effects of interactive play as well as find ways of attracting children to video games without the use of violence.

Last summer, Mediascope published a study of film and television ratings in 36 countries and provinces. We found that the way in which a system is designed will have a significant impact on its ability to be effective in informing consumers. Some of the components of a quality rating system are: utilization of scientific evidence about the impact of content on children, recognition of developmental age differences, detailed explanations for ratings, the inclusion of independent professional experts and public accountability.

I am particularly concerned that any new ratings system recognize developmental differences between very young children and those over 7 or 8 years old. Too often, all children under age 13 are lumped together. What a 5-year-old sees, imitates, understands and is influenced by will be vastly different from what a 13-year-old comprehends.

Explanations about why a rating is given is also important. If, for example, it was because of violent or sexual content, then the consumer should know this. It would also be helpful to know if the level is mild or extreme. This could be conveyed through a series of symbols which visually show a range or degree of intensity.

I would also encourage the inclusion of professionals from child development, education and media research in any ratings process. In our review of ratings systems around the world, we found only one that does not include this. This same system, which happens to oversee the movie ratings system of the United States, also keeps the identities of its raters secret. It is my opinion that both the lack of professional guidance and the secrecy of the process undermine the legitimacy of the system. I urge the interactive industry not to follow this approach. Providing public accountability will lend credibility to the interactive ratings process from the outset.

This is a unique moment in history when a number of entertainment industries are developing or revisiting their own rating systems. There are a variety of technologies being developed at this time which will have the capability to decipher ratings in televisions, VCR's, computers and video game players.

The interactive video world has an opportunity to set a standard that others might follow. In fact, what could possibly emerge from this process might be a uniform series of entertainment ratings that could be used across all entertainment outlets.

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the hearing, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you very much.

Mr. MARKEY. Our next witness is Mr. Douglas Lowenstein, the president of Interactive Digital Software Association. We welcome you, sir.

STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS LOWENSTEIN

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. Thank you. My name is Doug Lowenstein, and I am president of the Interactive Digital Software Association.

The IDSA was formed this past April to represent the interests of the rapidly growing and evolving interactive entertainment software and hardware industry. Our founding members are Acclaim, Atari, Capcom, Crystal Dynamics, Electronic Arts, Konami, Nintendo of America, Phillips, Sega of America, Sony, Viacom and Virgin interactive.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to share with this subcommittee some details on our effort to develop a rating system to give consumers reliable information on the content of interactive entertainment software.

This is, I should add, IDSA's first congressional appearance, and it is a privilege to do so before the subcommittee that is in the vanguard of communications and entertainment policy.

Before discussing our efforts to create a rating system, I would like to take a moment to describe our industry. The home video game component of the interactive entertainment industry has undergone enormous change since Atari first introduced Pong in 1976. Less than 20 years later, this is a \$6 billion and growing industry offering thousands of titles with three-dimensional graphics, full-motion characters, live-action video and dozens of levels of play in a single title.

Originally, the predominant market for our products was children, and, of course, they are still an important and valuable segment. But as video game technology produces faster, more realistic, sharper, more complex and more interactive software, our market is rapidly attracting a diverse and older audience. The Atari generation of the 1970's and the Nintendo generation of the 1980's have grown up, and many young adults are using a wide variety of interactive entertainment software.

Last December, Congress, some parents groups and media focused considerable attention to a handful of newly released video games which contained content that some found objectionable. The fact is that a majority of our industry's products are educational games, sports games or pure entertainment games like Sonic or Mario, which are suitable for users of all ages.

But, nonetheless, our industry recognized that the combination of congressional concerns about violence in entertainment mediums plus our market's changing demographics and the emergence of advanced technologies made a compelling case for providing consumers of all ages with additional information about these products.

The decision to self-regulate was made each easier by our strong belief that the choice of what products to purchase should be left to consumers. It is our belief that neither the IDSA nor the government can constitutionally regulate content, nor should they try. That should remain the responsibility of individual publishers and platform manufacturers.

But we also believe that the constitutional right to control content is properly accompanied by a responsibility to give consumers reliable, understandable, credible information about the products they purchase.

In this case, knowledge is the most powerful tool we can provide to consumers so last January we accepted the challenge to develop a ratings system for our rapidly evolving industry. The IDSA has created an independent, third-party entity, with its own executive director, to assign ratings to software before products are shipped to stores.

The executive director, Dr. Arthur Pober, was formerly the vice president and director of the Children's Advertising Review Unit of the Council of Better Business Bureaus and has spent his career working on children's issues.

Dr. Pober is hiring a group of demographically diverse raters. Publishers will not determine the ratings applied to their products. The hallmark of the review process being created by Dr. Pober is independent, third-party, pre-market review. Frankly, such a system is more onerous to industry, but it is also far more useful and trustworthy for consumers. Dr. Pober is presently receiving comment on the draft ratings system from child development experts and industry.

I should add that we voluntarily sought this. We have gone out to a wide variety of groups—Mediascope is one of them—a variety of parent groups and advocacy groups to solicit their input and expertise on the development of the system. It is very much a work in progress. We hope the system will be finalized in the next few weeks, and we will be happy to come back here either in a public forum or certainly with your staff and members of this subcommittee to share with you the details of the system as it is finalized.

I can tell you in broad terms that, in addition to rating categories, the ratings board has developed a unique system of descriptors which independent raters will be free to include when appropriate with the ratings symbol. These descriptors will provide more information on game content such as animated violence or mature sexual themes or realistic violence so that consumers not only get a sense of the ages for which a game is appropriate but also the content which influenced the rating.

Providing this additional information I think makes the system that we are designing unique among entertainment rating systems in the United States, and I think it is consistent with what Ms. Kelly has discussed in her testimony about the importance of going beyond simply a symbol and providing people with some sense of what drove the rating.

I know that the subcommittee has a special interest in technology that will give parents the ability to block access to certain kinds of programs and games available through the TV set. At this time, IDSA has no position on blocking technology. I can say, however, that we do believe that development of a rating system is an essential predicate for blocking technology to be effective. And we also believe that the ratings applied by the independent ratings board should be carried on a game, regardless of how it is delivered to consumers.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to appear, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you, sir.

And our final witness appeared before the subcommittee last year, and he has been good enough to agree to come back again on this subject. Dr. Robert McAfee, representing the American Medical Association as its president-elect.

The American Medical Association recently called for more detailed information on violence to be provided to parents, and his testimony has really helped to catalyze this subcommittee in the past, and we welcome you back.

Sir, whenever you feel comfortable, please begin.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT E. McAFEE

Mr. McAFEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. Good morning.

My name is Dr. Robert McAfee, and I am president of the American Medical Association. I must tell you, Mr. Chairman, with all humility I am the first physician from the State of Maine and the first from New England in the past 25 years in that position. I hope that you share vicariously in that.

Mr. MARKEY. Maine used to be a part of Massachusetts.

Mr. McAFEE. We refer to Massachusetts as a former appendage of the great State of Maine.

But on behalf of AMA, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have this opportunity to testify regarding the very serious problem of media violence in this country today. It is my intention during my presidential year to use violence, particularly family violence, as one of my major themes.

First of all, I would like to tell you about a report that was recently considered by our AMA House of Delegates on mass media violence and film ratings. Redressing Shortcomings in the Current System was the title, and it is appended to our statement.

This report was adopted as AMA policy at our annual meeting just 2 weeks ago. The report discusses major problems with the motion picture ratings system currently in existence in this country and suggests specific changes to improve the current system.

The real reason that this report is so important, however, is that it expresses the AMA's recommendation to make the ratings system uniform for movies, for television and video programs. That is, to develop a uniform ratings system which can be applied across the existing and future entertainment technologies.

The report points out that, beyond the mere G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17 ratings, the current movie rating system doesn't provide sufficient information for parents and other consumers to make informed judgments about the violent or sexual content in motion pictures. Labels such as R and PG provide little information about the actual content of a film or why it was given a particular label. An R rating by itself does not tell a parent about the type of violence depicted, the victim and what sexual behavior is shown.

Next, the current movie rating system divides viewers into three broad age categories, 0 to 12 years, 13 to 16, and 17 years of age and older, but this division fails to take into account critical stages of cognitive development in a child's life. Younger children's inter-

pretations and reactions to media portrayals differ dramatically from those of individuals in pre- or early adolescence.

A more specifically based categorization system would divide children under 13 into 2 age groupings—age 3 to 7 and age 8 to 12.

Next, the current movie rating system focuses on the amount or explicitness of violence or sex in a film but does not take into account the context of these portrayals, as was mentioned by Congressman Lantos this morning. In this regard, it is essential to realize that contextual features of media violence are critical mediators of harmful effects and that such features often affect younger and older children differently.

AMA supports changes in the current movie rating system. The proposed changes would include basing age classifications on known critical child development periods such as those currently used in several European countries, labeling movies and television programs in terms of content that is potentially harmful and supplementing this information with a brief description of the harmful material, adding experts in child development and media effects to the movie ratings board and making the ratings system more widely publicized and accessible to parents.

Violence in this country today has unquestionably become a major medical and public health epidemic. Almost 20 years ago, the AMA first adopted a strong policy decrying television violence, and our concern with TV violence and our efforts in addressing it continue to this day.

We have testified on several occasions on television and motion picture violence in the last year before various congressional committees and subcommittees, including my appearance before this subcommittee last July.

Additionally, it gave me great pleasure to appear with the subcommittee chairman, you, Mr. Chairman, last summer and with many members of your committee at that time when you announced the introduction, with Representative Fields, of H.R. 2828, the Television Violence Reduction Through Parental Empowerment Act. That bill would allow parents to block out television programs they do not want their children to watch.

The AMA strongly supports H.R. 2828 which we think will have a positive impact on halting the violent behavior that many of our children learn through watching TV. And while respecting the first amendment rights of television producers and broadcasters to air programming not appropriate for viewing by children, it will empower parents with the means to effect their judgment in carrying out decisions as to what TV programs their children should or should not watch and to exercise their appropriate role and rightful responsibility in determining the types of television programs to which their children will be exposed.

Parents need and parents deserve this help in supervising their children's viewing behavior and guiding them in the right direction. We need to help parents parent.

Taking this rationale one step further, we would also support measures, if technologically feasible, to allow parents to block out programs on interactive games delivered or cable systems which are rated as violent. And we have heard this morning. And, after

all, if problems have existed with regard to children viewing violence through traditional broadcast television or motion pictures, one can only imagine what may result through new technologies down the road.

Finally, a subject of great concern to the AMA is the prevalent depiction of violent behavior in video games, especially in terms of role-modeling capacity to potentially promote real-world violence. There is little question that many video games are aimed and marketed toward youth, as is the case with TV violence.

We think that children learn behavior by example. Young children possess an instinctive desire to imitate actions which they observe without always possessing the intellect or maturity to determine if such actions are appropriate.

While the impact of violent video games on children is not as clearly established as the impact of violent television programming which has been substantiated by decades of studies, we are fearful of a link between violent video games and aggression. We are concerned that playing violent video games with their new, fully digitalized human images will promote children becoming more aggressive towards other children and becoming more tolerant of and more likely to engage in real-life violence.

Video game violence is certainly no small problem. Millions of our youth spend countless hours playing video games. AMA believes that, like violence depicted elsewhere in the media, video game violence has horrifying potential to coarsen society to promote acts of violence against real victims and to desensitize children to the real thing.

I am delighted to hear the efforts being promoted by the industry in the testimony today, and I thank you for affording me the opportunity to appear before you today. And I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have. Thank you very much.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you, Doctor, very much.

[Testimony resumes on p. 49.]

[The prepared statement and attachment of Dr. McAfee follow:]

STATEMENT

of the

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

to the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND FINANCE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

Presented by

Robert E. McAfee, MD

RE: VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA

June 30, 1994

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Robert E. McAfee, MD. I am the President of the American Medical Association (AMA). Accompanying me today is Jeffery M. Stokols, Legislative Counsel in the AMA's Division of Federal Legislation. On behalf of the AMA, I am pleased to have this opportunity to testify regarding the very serious problem of media violence in this country today. Certainly, in a free society, there must be a fair balance between individual rights of expression and societal responsibility. We believe that balance can be achieved by providing Americans tools they need to identify and differentiate the programming with which they are presented and to select programming for themselves and their families.

Violence in this country today, in all of its forms, has become a major medical and public health epidemic. It is surrounded by controversy over its causes, consequences and solutions. In part, this is because violence is so thoroughly intertwined with our daily lives. Violence has been incorporated into

our routines and our entertainment; it truly is pervasive in our society, tied to social ills ranging from poverty to crime to racism to lack of opportunity.

Over 2 million people in this country each year suffer from violent nonfatal injuries. Each year, an estimated 50,000 deaths are attributable to violence in the form of homicide and suicide. The United States ranks first among industrialized nations in violent death rates. Unquestionably, America today is a land of violence.

The AMA strongly abhors, and has actively condemned and worked to reduce, violence in all forms in our society, including violence portrayed on television and in motion pictures. In recent years, the AMA (along with such other national organizations as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Psychiatric Association, the National Academy of Science, and the American Psychological Association) have come to the realization that the mass media are not innocent bystanders insofar as the causes of violent behavior in our society is concerned. The general public agrees; in a recent national poll, 79% of Americans indicated their belief that media violence directly contributes to the problem of actual violence in our society.

Over the past two decades, a growing body of scientific research has documented the relationship between the mass media and violent behavior. Reports by the U.S. Surgeon General, the National Institutes of Mental Health, the National Academy of Science, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Society of Adolescent Medicine, among others, have arrived at a similar conclusion--namely, that programming shown by the mass media contributes significantly to the aggressive behavior and, in particular, to aggression-related attitudes of many children, adolescents, and adults. Analyses of research studies support two conclusions: 1) there is a positive association between televised violence exposure

and aggressive behavior across a wide range of ages and measures of aggressive behavior; and 2) exposure to violent programming increases aggressive behavior and is associated with lower levels of prosocial behavior.

BROADCAST TELEVISION

The AMA has long been concerned about the prevalent depiction of violent behavior on television, especially in terms of the "role-modeling" capacity to potentially promote "real-world" violence. With strong policy statements, we have decried such depictions of violence for almost 20 years.

Children in the United States are exposed to high levels of media violence. Research data show that there are approximately five to six violent acts per hour on prime time and 20 to 25 acts on Saturday morning children's television programs. Within the United States, this accounts for about 188 hours of violent programs per week, or approximately 15% of program time. In addition to broadcast television, cable TV adds to the level of violence through new, more violent, programs, and by recycling older violent broadcasts. A recent survey by the Center for Media and Public Affairs identified 1,846 violent scenes broadcast and cablecast between 6AM and midnight on one day in Washington, D.C. The most violent periods were between 6AM and 9AM, with 497 violent scenes, and between 2PM and 5PM, with 609 violent scenes. Most of this violence in the morning and early afternoon is viewed by children. Given that children watch between two and four hours of television each day, it is estimated that by the time children leave elementary school, they have viewed 8,000 killings and more than 100,000 other acts of violence. As they near the end of their teenage years, they have viewed more than 200,000 violent acts in the media, including 40,000 killings. This figure can only increase as more children are exposed to cable premium channels or view R-rated films in video cassette form.

Research evidence suggests that those who are heavy viewers of violence in the mass media demonstrate increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behavior. In this regard, studies indicate that the viewing of televised aggression leads to increases in subsequent aggression that can become part of a lasting behavioral pattern. Aggressive habits learned early in life form the foundation for later behavior. Aggressive children who have trouble in school and relating to peers tend to watch more television. The violence they see, in turn, may reinforce their tendency toward aggression.

It is well-established that children learn behavior by example. They have an instinctive desire to imitate actions which they observe, without always possessing the intellect or maturity to determine if such actions are appropriate. This principle certainly applies to TV violence. Consequently, children's exposure to violence in the mass media, particularly at young ages, can have lifelong consequences.

Prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward real-world violence and the victims of violence, which can result in callous attitudes toward violence directed at others and a decreased likelihood to take action on behalf of the victim when violence occurs. Furthermore, in addition to increasing aggressive behavior towards others, viewing mass media violence can significantly change attitudes about violence. Viewing violence can increase fears of becoming a victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behaviors and increased mistrust of others.

Undoubtedly, then, media violence is a tremendous problem and may very likely have particularly harmful or negative effects upon certain segments of the viewing population, including children, emotionally unstable individuals with volatile personalities, and spouse or child abusers (that is, upon those too young to understand or otherwise unable or ill-equipped to comprehend that violence should not be employed as a means to solve problems and to "right" perceived wrongs).

"TELEVISION VIOLENCE REDUCTION THROUGH PARENTAL EMPOWERMENT ACT"

In addressing television and motion picture violence, the AMA has testified several times within the last year before various Congressional committees and subcommittees, including an appearance before this Subcommittee at its hearing last July. In addition, the AMA was honored and pleased to be present with Subcommittee Chairman Markey last summer when he announced the introduction with Representative Fields of H.R. 2888, the "Television Violence Reduction Through Parental Empowerment Act of 1993." The bill would allow parents to "block out" television programming they do not want their children to watch. We strongly support H.R. 2888, which we think should have a positive impact on halting the violent behavior that many of our children learn through watching television. While respecting the First Amendment rights of TV producers and broadcasters to air programming perhaps not appropriate for viewing by children, it will empower parents with the means to effect their judgment in carrying out decisions as to what TV programs their children should or should not watch, and to exercise their appropriate role and rightful responsibility in determining the types of television programs to which their children will be exposed. Parents need and deserve this help in supervising their children's viewing behavior and guiding them in the right direction. Taking this rationale one step further, we would also support measures, if technologically feasible, to allow parents to block out programs or interactive games delivered over cable systems which are rated as violent.

NEW VIDEO AND CABLE TECHNOLOGIES

If problems have existed with regard to children viewing violence through traditional broadcast television materials or motion pictures, one can only imagine what may result through new technologies. Television is different today than in the past. Children and adults are exposed to different types of programs on cable than on commercial television. Today, the average viewer has access to numerous program channels including very specialized "pay cable" stations. The availability of VCRs has also changed the types of

content that children can view in the home. In 1970, VCRs were virtually nonexistent; today, 77% of homes in the United States have a VCR, with further expansion expected in the future. While some of this content is undoubtedly positive, such as educational and cultural programs, much of it is violent.

Recent studies have indicated that children with access to VCRs and/or cable programming have seen more R-rated films than children without such access. The fact that many of these films would only be shown on commercial television if substantial editing were done suggests that children are exposed to different materials today than in the past. Graphic violence, sexual content, and mature themes are more readily available for children today. For example, MTV, one of the most popular cable programs, televises at least one occurrence of violence in over 50% of its videos. This rate of violence far exceeds that of commercial television. There is no evidence that parents restrict their children's access to premium cable or VCRs. In fact, their rules seem to be less restrictive, particularly regarding PG-13 and R-rated films. This would suggest that the VCR, cable, and the newer video demand services have greatly enlarged access to violent programming by young viewers.

VIDEO GAMES

On the subject of video games, another alarming problem is the prevalent depiction of violent behavior in video games, especially in terms of the "role-modeling" capacity to potentially promote "real world" violence. There is little question that many video games are aimed and marketed towards youth. As was stated earlier with regard to TV violence, it is well-established that children learn behavior by example. Young children possess an instinctive desire to imitate actions which they observe, without always possessing the intellect or maturity to determine if such actions are appropriate.

While the impact of violent video games upon children is not as clearly established as the impact of violent television programming (which has been substantiated by decades of studies), we are extremely fearful of a potential link between violent video games and aggression. We are concerned that playing violent video games, with their now fully digitalized human images, will promote children becoming more aggressive towards other children and becoming more tolerant of (and more likely to engage in) "real-life" violence.

Video game violence is certainly no small problem; millions of our youth spend countless hours playing video games. The AMA believes that, like violence depicted elsewhere in the media, video game violence has horrifying potential to coarsen society, promote acts of violence against real victims, and desensitize children to the real thing.

The AMA believes that something must be done to deal with video game violence. We have suggested in Congressional testimony earlier this year that perhaps a written message should appear on the video game screen at the beginning of each game in which some character is killed, such as:

"THIS IS A GAME THAT SHOWS MURDER AND KILLING. IT IS ONLY A VIDEO GAME, BUT IN REAL LIFE, MURDER AND KILLING IS PERMANENT. IT IS VERY WRONG, IT CAUSES A LOT OF PAIN AND SADNESS, AND MURDERERS ARE PUNISHED AND CAN GO TO JAIL FOR A VERY LONG TIME"!

We also suggest, in the spirit of the video medium, that scenes should be incorporated into games in which the consequences of violent acts are depicted in connection with some innocent character being injured or killed--scenes such as an ambulance rushing the character to a hospital or cemetery, and other characters representing the family and friends of the injured or killed character crying and grieving.

In March of this year, the AMA submitted testimony in support of S. 1823, the "Video Game Rating Act of 1994," a bill designed to develop a video game rating system in order to provide parents and other consumers with information about violent or sexually explicit material contained in video games.

RATINGS SYSTEMS

Finally, on the subject of ratings systems, the AMA House of Delegates just this month adopted as AMA policy a report on "Mass Media Violence and Film Ratings: Redressing Shortcomings in the Current System." The report discussed five major problems with the motion picture rating system currently in existence in this country.

First, it pointed out that, beyond the mere "G," "PG," "PG-13," "R," and "NC-17" ratings, the current movie rating system does not provide sufficient information for parents and other consumers to make informed judgments about the violent or sexual content in motion pictures. (Labels such as "R" and "PG" provide little information about the actual content of a film or why it was given a particular label; an "R" rating by itself does not tell a parent about the type of violence depicted, the victim, and what sexual behavior is shown.)

Second, the current movie rating system divides viewers into three broad age categories (0-12 years, 13-16 years, and 17 years of age and older), but this division fails to take into account critical stages of cognitive development in a child's life. (Younger children's interpretations and reactions to media portrayals differ dramatically from those of individuals in pre- or early adolescence. A more scientifically-based categorization system would divide children under 13 years old into two age groupings: ages 3 to 7 years, and 8 to 12 years.)

Third, the current movie rating system focuses on the amount or explicitness of violence and sex in a film, but does not take into account the context of these portrayals. In this regard, it is essential to realize that contextual features of media violence are critical mediators of harmful effects and that such features often affect younger and older children differently.

Fourth, the current movie rating system has more stringent ratings for sexual content and profanity than for violence. Evidence suggests that profanity in movies results in less serious consequences to children than does violence. Nonexplicit sexual portrayals are far less harmful than either explicit or nonexplicit sexual depictions that also contain violence. The critical factor that produces antisocial effects is violence, not sexuality per se. The emphasis on profanity and nudity in rating films therefore seems misplaced.

Finally, the movie ratings board (the "Classification and Rating Administration," known as CARA) currently has no members who are experts in child development or specialists in the effects of mass media on children. Members of CARA are appointed by leaders in the entertainment industry. Their identities are not publicly released and critics have charged that the board lacks public accountability.

The AMA supports changes in the current movie rating system. The proposed changes include: basing age classifications on known, critical child developmental periods, such as those currently used in several European countries; labeling movies and television or video programs in terms of the content that is potentially harmful, and supplementing this information with a brief description of the harmful material; adding experts in child development and media effects to the ratings board; making the rating system more widely publicized and easily accessible to parents; and making the rating system uniform for movies, television, and video programs--that is, developing a uniform rating system which can be applied across existing and future entertainment technologies.

To expand slightly on the last two recommendations stated above, the AMA believes that ratings need to be publicized widely and must be easily accessible to parents. Ratings could be published in newspaper advertisements for a film, in movie previews, and on all videocassette copies of films. Moreover, a similar ratings system could be employed for television. Currently, both cable television and the networks have responded to government pressure over entertainment violence by promising to develop an independent monitoring system to assess aggressive programming. Rather than creating numerous labeling schemes, one system could be used across different forms of mass media. This uniformity would greatly help parents to make informed decisions about media outlets and types of violent programming which are available to children.

Thank you for affording me the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

B of T Report 18-A-94

Subject: Mass Media Violence and Film Ratings: Redressing Shortcomings in the Current System
(Resolution 418, A-93)

Presented by: Lonnie R. Bristow, MD, Chair

Referred to: Reference Committee D
(Peter W. Carmel, MD, Chair)

At the 1993 Annual Meeting, Resolution 418 was introduced by the Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont delegations and was referred to the Board of Trustees. The resolution states "that the American Medical Association, in the interest of improving mental health and reducing acts of violence, lead a public awareness program directed toward people of all ages to better understand the definition of the movie ratings and to demand that a movie rating accompany all movies that are advertised and reviewed, and posted where shown, and that all video stores and television movie programs also be required to advertise the movie ratings in advance of it being viewed or rented."

America is a violent society. As a nation the United States ranks first among all developed countries in the world in homicides. In 1991 there were more than 5.8 million violent crimes,¹ including 21,505 homicides.² Among individuals 15 to 24 years old, homicide is the second leading cause of death, and for African-American youth it is number one.³ The homicide rate has increased at six times the population rate, and continues to climb.⁴ In a recent national poll, Americans listed crime as the number one problem facing society.⁵ Over the past few years violence has been recognized as a major health problem in the United States by the American Medical Association (AMA) (Policy 515.979, AMA Policy Compendium) and other national groups.

There are many factors that determine violent behavior. Drugs, guns, poverty, racism, family and community environment all play a role, with many of these interacting with each other. In recent years national organizations such as the AMA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,⁶ the American Psychiatric Association,⁷ the National Academy of Science,⁸ and the American Psychological Association⁹ have examined the perplexing problem of the causes of violent behavior. Cutting across all these investigations has been a realization that the mass media are not innocent bystanders, and their contribution to the problem must be evaluated and understood. In a recent national poll, 79% of Americans indicated their belief that media violence directly contributes to the problem of violence in our society.¹⁰

Action of the AMA House of Delegates 1994 Annual Meeting: Council on Scientific Affairs
Report 5 recommendations adopted as amended and the remainder of the report filed.

Over the past two decades a growing body of scientific research has documented the relationship between the mass media and violent behavior. Reports by the U.S. Surgeon General,¹¹ the National Institutes of Mental Health,¹² the American Psychological Association,⁹ the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,⁷ the National Academy of Science,⁸ and the Society of Adolescent Medicine¹³ have arrived at a similar conclusion, namely, that programming shown by the mass media contribute significantly to the aggressive behavior and, in particular, to aggression-related attitudes of many children, adolescents, and adults. While arguments against this conclusion have been put forth,¹⁴⁻¹⁶ meta analyses of research studies support two conclusions.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ First, there is a positive association between televised violence exposure and aggressive behavior across a wide range of ages and measures of aggressive behavior. Second, exposure to violent programming increases aggressive behavior and is associated with lower levels of prosocial behavior. As Comstock and Strasberger point out, "the literature gives little comfort to those who assert that the findings are evenly divided, the studies are inferior, or that violence on TV does not influence behavior."^{20,p.32} The AMA has long been concerned about the impact of media violence on behavior. Over a decade ago the AMA expressed concern about the role of the mass media when it stated, "The AMA reaffirms its vigorous opposition to television violence and its support for efforts designed to increase the awareness of physicians and patients that television violence is a risk factor threatening the health of young people." (Policy 485.995, [AMA Policy Compendium](#))

During the past year, in statements before the United States House of Representatives Telecommunications and Finance Subcommittee, and before the United States Senate Constitution and Juvenile Justice Subcommittee, the AMA again took a strong stand on the issue of media violence and called for immediate action. In testimony before Congress the AMA concluded, "The AMA believes that dramatically reducing TV and motion picture violence will require concerted efforts on the part of parents, educators, child advocacy groups, law enforcement officials, the clergy, the medical profession, citizens groups, government, and the TV and cable TV and motion picture industries. The time for action is now; considering the damage to our society that TV and motion picture violence is capable of causing, there truly is not a moment to spare."²¹

Resolution 418 (A-93) clearly aims to ensure that all consumers, and parents, in particular, have an opportunity to make informed judgments about the entertainment options available to them and to their children. However, as described later in this report, the current movie ratings system does not offer sufficient information to allow consumers to make these determinations. Public awareness of the ratings system and use of the ratings in the video and television markets are important, but the first priority should be to revise the present ratings system so that it can be used effectively by consumers to determine exposure to media violence. The purpose of this report is to review the scientific literature on the relationship between exposure to media violence and aggression, to describe trends in exposure to violent programming in current and future technologies, to review the current movie ratings system and its underlying assumptions, and to provide a rationale for why the current ratings system needs to be revised and take into account cognitive development during the preteen years. The report concludes with recommendations for revising the ratings system and its relevance for physicians and public health.

Research Findings on Media Violence

Children in the United States are exposed to high levels of media violence. Research data show that there are approximately five to six violent acts per hour on prime time and 20 to 25 acts on Saturday morning children's television programs.²² Within the United States this accounts for about 188 hours of violent programs per week, or approximately 15% of program time.²³ In

addition to broadcast television, cable TV adds to the level of violence through new, more violent, programs, and by recycling older violent broadcasts. A recent survey by the Center for Media and Public Affairs identified 1,846 violent scenes broadcast and cablecast between 6 a.m. and midnight on one day in Washington, D.C.²⁴ The most violent periods were between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m., with 497 violent scenes, and between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m., with 609 violent scenes. Most of this violence is presented without context or judgment as to its acceptability, and most of the violence in the morning and early afternoon is viewed by children. Given that children watch between two and four hours of television each day, it is estimated that by the time children leave elementary school they have viewed 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence. As they near the end of their teenage years they have viewed more than 200,000 violent acts in the media, including 40,000 murders. This figure will increase as more children are exposed to Cable Premium channels or view R-rated films in video cassette form. As will be discussed later, the content of television programming is much different today than it was a decade ago.

Research evidence suggests that those who are heavy viewers of violence in the mass media demonstrate increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behavior.²⁵ Furthermore, the correlation between violence viewing and aggressive behavior is fairly stable over time, place, and demographic characteristics.²⁶ More importantly, naturalistic field studies and cross-national studies supported the position that the viewing of televised aggression leads to increases in subsequent aggression that can become part of a lasting behavioral pattern.²⁶ Aggressive habits learned early in life form the foundation for later behavior. Aggressive children who have trouble in school and relating to peers tend to watch more television. The violence they see, in turn, may reinforce their tendency toward aggression. These effects are, apparently, both short-term and long-lasting. In fact, a clear and significant relationship has been found between exposure to televised violence at age eight and adult aggressive behavior (seriousness of criminal acts) 22 years later.^{27,28} As Huesmann noted, "Aggressive habits seem to be learned early in life, and once established, are resistant to change and predictive of serious adult antisocial behavior. If a child's observation of media violence promotes the learning of aggressive habits, it can have harmful lifelong consequences."^{27, pp. 129-130} Consequently, children's exposure to violence in the mass media, particularly at young ages, can have lifelong consequences.

One explanation of these findings is that prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward real world violence and the victims of violence, which can result in callous attitudes toward violence directed at others and a decreased likelihood to take action on behalf of the victim when violence occurs.²⁵ Research on desensitization to media violence has shown that although observers react initially with relatively intense physiological responses to scenes of violence, habituation can occur with prolonged or repeated exposure and this habituation can carry over to other settings.²⁹ Once viewers are emotionally "comfortable" with violent content, they may also evaluate media violence more favorably in other domains.³⁰ Material originally believed to be offensive or degrading to the victims of violence may be evaluated as less so with continued exposure. A reduction in the level of anxiety may also blunt viewers' awareness of the frequency and intensity of violence in the films. Reductions in anxiety may serve to decrease sensitivity to emotional cues associated with each violent episode and, thereby, reduce viewers' perceptions of the amount of violence in the films. Consequently, by the end of an extensive exposure period, viewers may perceive aggressive films as less violent than they had initially. These altered perceptual and affective reactions may then be carried over into judgments

1 made about victims of violence in other more realistic settings. Research data have indicated that
2 these "carry over" effects can occur with exposure periods of as little as one hour.³¹

3
4 In addition to increasing aggressive behaviors toward others, viewing mass media violence can
5 significantly change attitudes about violence. Viewing violence can increase fears of becoming a
6 victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behaviors and increased mistrust of
7 others. Research has shown that heavy viewers of media violence tend to have a perception of
8 social reality matching that which is presented in the mass media.³² Heavy viewers tend to see the
9 world as more crime-ridden and dangerous, and are more fearful of walking alone in their own
10 neighborhoods. Furthermore, viewing violence increases viewers' appetites for becoming involved
11 in violence or exposing themselves to violence.⁹

12
13 Sex and violence are common themes in mass media presentations. Content analyses of the mass
14 media indicate that one out of eight Hollywood films depicts a rape,³³ and analyses of X- and R-
15 rated videotapes reveal approximately as much sexual violence in R-rated materials, widely
16 available to teenagers, as was found in X-rated tapes.³⁴ Select cable channels and VCR would be
17 the main access for youth to these films.

18
19 Research data indicate that some males exposed to these presentations can become sexually
20 aroused, report callous attitudes about rape and, based on laboratory studies, increase their
21 aggression against women.³⁵⁻³⁹ In addition, research results indicate that these attitude and arousal
22 patterns may have some relationship to actual "real world" aggression toward women.⁴⁰ While this
23 research has been primarily conducted with viewers over 18 years of age, stronger effects might
24 be expected for younger viewers because they lack the critical viewing skills and the experience
25 necessary to discount the myths about women and sexual violence. To an adolescent searching for
26 information about sexual relationships, sexual violence in popular films may be a potent formative
27 influence on attitudes toward sexuality. A young teenager's first exposure to sex may come in the
28 form of a mildly erotic but violent movie such as a slasher film. This film would not be restricted
29 to adults because it did not carry an "X" rating. It could easily be rented at a video outlet or
30 found on a late-night cable movie.

31 32 **Violent Programming and New Technologies**

33
34 Many of the research findings discussed above were based upon traditional broadcast television
35 materials or films which children in the past would not have viewed. Television is different today
36 than in the past. Children and adults are exposed to different types of programs on cable than
37 commercial television. Today the average viewer has access to numerous program channels
38 including very specialized "pay cable" stations. The availability of VCRs has also changed the
39 types of content that children can view in the home. In 1970, VCRs were virtually nonexistent;
40 today 77% of homes in the United States have a VCR, with further expansion expected in the
41 future.²⁵ More importantly, children have increased access to VCR programming, not only in the
42 United States but in many other countries. VCR use is greater among children and teens than
43 adults.⁴¹ While some of this content would undoubtedly be considered positive (i.e., educational
44 and cultural programs), much of it is violent.

Recent studies have indicated that children with access to VCRs and/or cable programming have seen more R-rated films than children without such access.⁴¹ The fact that many of these films would only be shown on commercial television if substantial editing were done suggests that children are exposed to different materials today than in the past. Graphic violence, sexual content, and mature themes are more readily available for children today. For example, MTV, one of the most popular cable programs, televises at least one occurrence of violence in over 50% of its videos.⁴² This rate of violence far exceeds that of commercial television. There is no evidence that parents restrict their children's access to premium cable or VCRs. In fact, their rules seem to be less restrictive, particularly regarding PG-13 and R-rated films. This would suggest that the VCR, cable, and the newer video on demand services, have greatly enlarged access to content of all types, especially violence, by young viewers.

The Motion Picture Ratings System and Public Response

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), a film industry trade group, attempts to provide information to viewers about the content of various movies. This information is conveyed in the form of ratings that accompany most commercial films. The familiar "G," "PG," "PG-13," "R," and "NC-17" also are typically publicized on videocassette copies of these films. The MPAA ratings system was created in 1968 in response to two U.S. Supreme Court cases that authorized local and state governments to restrict children's access to objectionable films.^{43,44}

According to representatives of the entertainment industry, the purpose of the MPAA system is "to offer parents some advance information about movies so that parents can decide what movies they want their children to see or not to see."^{45, p. 4} Because the ratings emerged in response to public pressure for government regulation, the MPAA has tried from the beginning to be responsive to the attitudes of the general public. This resulted in the creation of a board known as the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA). CARA is comprised of 11 individuals from the Los Angeles area whose full- or part-time job is to review films. The board members are comprised of parents but do not include experts in child development or specialists in the effects of mass media on children. Members are required to have "an intelligent maturity" and a "shared parenthood experience."^{45, p. 6} Their task is to estimate how most American parents would evaluate a particular film. In 1992 the board members of CARA included two homemakers, a cabinetmaker, an office manager, a postal worker, a hair dresser, an author of children's books, a banker, a preschool teacher, an assistant film director, and a social services administrator.⁴⁶ Members of CARA are appointed by leaders in the entertainment industry. Their identities are not publicly released and critics have charged that the board lacks public accountability.^{47,49} Many have expressed concern about the requirements necessary for board membership. However, CARA has been criticized because "no one knows their names, . . . how they arrive at their decisions, whether as parents they more closely resemble June and Ward Cleaver or Ma Barker and Don Vito Corleone, or what qualifications they have other than being breeders."^{49, p. 4}

Films are submitted voluntarily to the board by producers or distributors who pay a fee for the ratings service. Unsubmitted films, usually international productions and some independent projects, typically are advertised as unrated and often are more difficult to market without the MPAA demarcation. The MPAA Rating Board examines each film in terms of the following elements: theme, violence, language, nudity, sex, and drug abuse. A "G" rating indicates that a

1 film is for "general audiences" and that it contains nothing in content that would be "offensive to
2 parents whose younger children view the film."^{43 p 7} No strong words are used, there is little
3 violence, and there are no sex scenes, nudity, or drug use.
4 The "PG" or "Parental Guidance Suggested" rating is given to a film that contains themes that
5 parents may consider to be unsuitable for some children under 17 years of age. There may be
6 some profanity or violence, but it is not deemed "strong" or "cumulative."^{45 p 8} A PG film contains
7 no illegal drug use or explicit sex, but there may be brief nudity or some display of sensuality.
8 The "PG-13" rating, added to the system in 1984, indicates that parents should be "strongly
9 cautioned" because some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. Specific criteria for
10 this ratings category are not well defined, however. A film will receive a PG-13 if it contains
11 illicit drug use or a single expletive involving a sexually-derived word. In general, a PG-13 film
12 is somehow "beyond the boundaries of the PG rating, but does not quite fit within the restricted R
13 category."^{44 p 8}

14
15 An "R" rating indicates that children under 17 are "restricted" from such films unless accompanied
16 by a parent or adult guardian. A film will receive an R rating if it contains violence that is
17 "tough," hard language, nudity within sexual scenes, drug abuse, or any combination of these
18 elements. Overall, an R rating means a film contains "adult-type" material with respect to
19 violence, sex, and/or language.

20
21 The "NC-17" category replaced the stigmatized "X" rating in 1990 in the hopes that it would be
22 more palatable and more marketable. This rating is reserved for "patently adult" films and no one
23 under 17 is allowed to attend. A film is given this rating if there is strong violence, explicit sex,
24 aberrational behavior or drug abuse that is deemed off-limits for children.

25
26 At first glance, the ratings system appears to be a useful device to inform parents about film
27 content and help them to monitor their children's exposure to media violence. In fact, in a 1990
28 poll commissioned by the MPAA, 75% of parents with children under 18 reported that the ratings
29 are "fairly" or "very" useful in helping them make movie-going decisions for their children.⁴⁵
30 Such polls are conducted annually for the MPAA and have been critiqued on scientific grounds.⁵⁰
31 Nevertheless, the entertainment industry cites these statistics as evidence that parents are generally
32 satisfied with the ratings.

33
34 However, there is evidence which suggests that the public would like more information than is
35 provided by the current ratings system. A 1987 nationwide poll conducted by the *Los Angeles*
36 *Times* found that 73% of parents favored the inclusion of additional grades like "V" for violence
37 and "S" for sex to the ratings system.⁵¹ Similarly, critics have argued that labels like R and PG
38 provide little information about the actual content of the film or why it was given a particular
39 label.^{52,53} In response to these charges, in 1990 the MPAA introduced five- to eight-word
40 explanations about why a film receives an R rating. Two years later the MPAA began providing
41 these informational tags for PG and PG-13 movies. These explanations are sent to theaters, film
42 critics, and video retailers, and are available to parents by calling to the local theater playing that
43 picture or inquiring at the box office. But the explanations typically are not provided in
44 newspaper advertisements of movies or in movie previews. Consequently, parents must actively
45 seek out this information. Moreover, making a telephone call to a local theater does not guarantee

1 a parent access to these explanations if the theater utilizes a computerized service of movie
2 listings, show times, and ratings.

3
4 Even if a parent finds these explanations they may not provide sufficient information. The MPAA
5 tags sometimes appear in local newspapers as part of a film critic's review of a movie. For
6 example, a recent *Los Angeles Times* review of Romeo is Bleeding contained the following:
7 "MPAA-rating: R, for strong violence, language and sexuality."³⁴ But this does not tell a parent
8 about the type of violence depicted, the victim, and what sexual behavior is included. Some
9 newspapers provide their own additional summaries. The *LA Times* review mentioned above went
10 on to state: "Times guidelines: It includes much blood-letting and several scenes of
11 dismemberment." Supplemental information underscores the relative lack of information provided
12 by the current ratings system about the content of the film.

13
14 The current movie ratings system has been criticized for being based on vague and imprecise
15 criteria. Filmmakers have charged that it is difficult to predict the rating that a film will receive.³⁵
16 Some films have received controversial ratings that seem inconsistent with those given to other
17 films. For example, the original version of Angel Heart, a movie with dark religious undertones
18 and one explicit scene involving sex and violence, was rated "X" until 10 seconds of material were
19 cut, while slasher films like Nightmare on Elm Street 3, which contain repeated scenes of graphic
20 violence and sexuality, are routinely given an "R" rating.³⁶ More recently, a film entitled WHORE
21 received an NC-17 rating because of its realistic portrayal of prostitution, while Pretty Woman,
22 which portrays prostitution as glamorous and fun, received an "R" rating.

23
24 Criticism voiced by the general public indicates that the ratings system is at best somewhat
25 uninformative and at worst misleading. The ratings provide little specific information about the
26 actual content of a film in terms of sex and violence. The designations are made by a group of
27 parents who possess little expertise with regard to the psychological or social effects of mass
28 media on children. In fact, the board is instructed to focus on how other parents might feel about
29 a film, not on how or whether a film might pose risks for children. The focus of the current
30 movie ratings system, therefore, appears to be on whether the content is offensive to American
31 parents, rather than on whether the content may be harmful to children. Assumptions based on
32 offensiveness are often inconsistent with social science research findings on the types of media
33 content that are detrimental to children and adolescents.

34 35 Assumptions of the Ratings System

36
37 At least three assumptions underlie the current movie ratings system and are relevant to the issue
38 of media violence. These assumptions are either explicitly stated as policy or can be inferred from
39 the application of ratings to certain films.

40
41 First, the system assumes that viewers should be divided into three broad age ranges: 0-12 years,
42 13-16 years, and 17 years of age or older. Currently, movies that are rated "G" or "PG" are
43 deemed appropriate for children under 13 years of age. Films rated "PG-13" are suitable for
44 teenagers but not necessarily for those under 13, and R-rated films are prohibited to those under
45 17 years of age unless accompanied by an adult. (Prior to 1984, the MPAA system categorized
46 viewers more simply, as either under 17 years of age or over. However, controversy surrounding

the release of Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom and Gremlins [both rated PG] resulted in the MPAA adding the PG-13 rating to its system in order to distinguish between content suitable for preteen versus teenage audiences.⁵⁷⁾

Presumably these age groupings exist because they reflect an estimation of critical stages in a child's life. However, such a classification ignores profound changes in cognitive development that occur during the preteen years. Consequently, movies that are rated as "G" or "PG" are deemed appropriate for any child under 13, without recognizing that a 5-year-old, for example, is likely to respond quite differently than a 12-year-old to a portrayal of violence.

Second, the ratings system focuses primarily on the amount of violence and sex, or the explicitness of such content, without taking into account the context of such portrayals. The appraisal of amount and context of sex and violence is controversial. As one media representative pointed out, "In any appraisal, what is 'too much?'" becomes very controversial. How much is "too much" violence? Are classic war films too violent with scenes of marines storming a beach and slaying hundreds, wounding thousands? Is it the graphic cop killing, the gangster shoot-out, or the slap across the face of a woman that determines "too much"? How much is "blood spilled" to be given emphasis? Where is the line to be drawn between "this is alright" and "this is not alright?"^{58 p. 6} The emphasis on quantity of sex and violence has tended to eclipse the contextual features of the violence, such as the rewards and punishments associated with a violent act and whether the violence is justified.

As an illustration, the movie Cliffhanger was rated "R," presumably because it contains more explicit and graphic violence than a movie like Home Alone 2, which was rated "PG." However, the latter film involves violence that is much more likely to be salient and attractive to young children because of its young star, Macaulay Culkin. In addition, while the violence in Home Alone 2 may be less intense than that in Cliffhanger, the manner in which it is portrayed may mislead younger children into thinking that violence is funny and is not associated with serious consequences.

From a research perspective, contextual features such as the nature of the perpetrator and the degree of justification for the violent behavior are important determinants of the impact of media violence. Moreover, many of these features affect children differently depending upon their stage of cognitive development.⁴¹

Third, the ratings system assumes that sexual content and profanity are more problematic than violence. According to CARA guidelines, any depiction of nudity within a sexual scene will automatically render a film an "R" rating and explicit sexuality will garner a film an "NC-17" rating. Similarly, the use of more than one expletive involving sexually-derived words will earn a film an "R" rating. In contrast, a film can contain violence and still receive a "G," "PG," or "PG-13" rating. The Rating Board's rule of thumb is that the violence must be "rough" or "persistent" before a film will earn an "R" rating and "strong" before applying the "NC-17" category. As an example of these differential standards, the film Rain Man, which portrays a growing relationship between an autistic man and his brother, was rated "R" because of occasional profanity, while the film Conan the Destroyer was rated "PG" despite scenes of "bloodthirsty battlers at every turn."^{58 p. 1006}

The three assumptions that underlie the current movie ratings system can be challenged from a social science perspective. Each one is inconsistent with a growing body of literature on child development and on the effects of the mass media on young people.

Cognitive Development During the Preteen Years

Research on child development conflicts with the first assumption regarding age specifications. The distinction made for youth under or over age 13 in the current movie ratings system ignores important changes that occur in children's cognitive abilities during the preteen years.⁶⁰ Indeed, preschoolers and young elementary school children can be distinguished from older elementary school children not only in what they know but also in how they think about the world. Younger children are more perceptually dependent in their thinking than are older children.⁶¹ Consequently, preschoolers and younger elementary schoolers are strongly influenced by the appearance or surface features of a stimulus, such as how it looks or sounds. In contrast, older children are better able to discount misleading appearances and consider more conceptual information in the same situation.⁶² As an example, E.T.'s physical appearance frightened many preschoolers, whereas older children recognized that the creature was benevolently motivated in spite of its strange looks.

Also, younger children have more difficulty than older children in distinguishing fantasy from reality.⁶⁴ A young child is apt to attribute life and realism to any character who looks or acts real. Thus, Ninja Turtles, Barney, and many other animal figures, whether animated or not, are perceived as real so long as they act like humans. As they develop, children gradually begin to compare media depictions to real life. Older elementary school children attribute realism to depictions that are possible in real life, whereas adolescents judge depictions as realistic only if they are probable based on their own personal experiences.⁶⁶

Finally, younger children are less able than older children to integrate pieces of information together from stories or narrations, and then to draw inferences from such information.⁶⁷ Consequently, linking different scenes together in a movie in order to make sense of the plot can be particularly difficult for younger children, especially when such scenes are not close in proximity or are out of chronological order.⁶⁹

These developmental trends suggest that children's interpretations and reactions to media portrayals differ dramatically from those of individuals in pre- or early adolescence. A more scientifically-based categorization system would divide children under 13 into two age groupings: ages 3 to 7 years, and 8 to 12 years. These groupings coincide with prominent theories of child development,^{69,60} and with the shift in cognitive skills described above.

Context of Violence

Research on the impact of media violence suggests that the context of violence, even in small amounts, is more important than the sheer amount or explicitness of violence, the basis for the current ratings system.⁷⁰ Contextual features help explain why a movie like The Terminator about a science fiction cyborg (part man, part machine) who is designed to kill people is more problematic than a movie like Schindler's List, about the Holocaust, even though they both contain

explicit depictions of violence. Research indicates that at least four contextual features of violence are critical determinants of whether such depictions will facilitate aggressive behavior. Many of these features are particularly significant when considered in light of the developmental tendencies documented above.

Consequences of violence. Several studies have shown that media violence that is rewarded is most likely to produce imitation effects or foster attitudes supportive of aggression.⁷¹⁻⁷³ Characters who receive money, popularity, or praise for violent actions are most likely to produce harmful effects among young viewers. But characters do not need to be explicitly rewarded for anti-social effects to occur. As long as there is no punishment associated with the violent act, younger viewers have been shown to imitate such portrayals,⁷¹ presumably because the lack of punishment essentially acts as a sanction for such behavior. Much of the dramatized violence in mass media is portrayed without negative consequences: neither perpetrators nor victims suffer much, and the perpetrator frequently is rewarded for antisocial behaviors.⁷⁴

Although both younger and older children are affected by the consequences of depicted violence, the timing of these elements in the plot has important developmental implications. In many scenarios, a character receives immediate rewards after performing a violent act. If any punishment occurs, it is usually delivered at the end of the movie. As mentioned previously, younger children have difficulty linking scenes together and drawing inferences from them. Thus, for movies in which rewards are immediate and punishment is delayed, younger children are more likely than older children to perceive the violence as sanctioned and to imitate such behavior.

Reality of violence. Another important contextual feature is the degree of reality associated with the violent portrayal. Research indicates that violence that is perceived as realistic is more likely to be imitated and used as a guide for behavior.^{75,76} Perceived reality, however, changes during the development of a child. As already noted, older children are better able to distinguish reality and fantasy, and should be more responsive to movies that feature violent acts that are humanly possible, such as Lethal Weapon 3 and Rocky. In contrast, younger children respond to both fantasy and reality so long as the depictions look or act real, so that movies with animated violent characters like The Transformers: The Movie are just as problematic as more realistic depictions.

Justified violence. A third contextual feature is the degree to which violence is defensible or justified in a given situation. Studies show that violence which is portrayed as justified is more likely to be imitated.^{77,78} A common theme in many movies is the hero who is forced to be violent because the job demands it (e.g., Dirty Harry) or because the hero must retaliate against an enemy (e.g., Rambo). These types of heroes are widely available in animated (e.g., Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) and non-animated form (e.g., Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves). The message in such movies is often prosocial, such as "don't be criminal" or "help other people," but it is conveyed in a violent context.

In one study of such mixed messages, younger children who were exposed to a hero who engaged in violence for a prosocial reason were actually more likely to hurt than to help a peer in subsequent play.⁷⁹ Moreover, both younger and older children were less likely to understand the moral of the story when it was conveyed in an aggressive versus nonaggressive context. Thus, a

hero who acts violently for some good cause is likely to be a confusing and negative role model for both younger and older children.

Pertinence of violence. A final critical factor is the degree of similarity between the viewer on the one hand and the characters and situations in the movie on the other. Research indicates that viewers are more likely to imitate media violence if cues in the portrayal are similar to those in the viewers' environment.⁸⁰ Moreover, children are more likely to attend to and imitate characters who are similar to themselves.⁸¹ These findings suggest that the nature of the perpetrator is an important aspect of the film from a child's perspective. Children are more likely to mimic the behavior of child actors than the behavior of adult actors. The particular age of the perpetrator is also important. Younger children are more likely to be attracted to child actors like Macaulay Culkin in Home Alone 2, whereas older children are more strongly influenced by preteen and teenage characters such as those in Karate Kid and Colors.

To summarize, the results of social science research suggest that contextual features of media violence are critical mediators of harmful effects and such features often affect younger and older children differently. Although the current movie ratings system considers violence when rating films, it appears to neglect important contextual and developmental factors.

Sexuality versus Violence

The third assumption of the current movie ratings system, that profanity and sexuality are somehow more problematic than violence, can also be challenged in light of scientific data. Unfortunately, there are fewer studies of the impact of media profanity and media sexuality on children than there are of media violence. However, in a recent review of the literature in the area of broadcast indecency, little evidence was found that sexual phrases and innuendos have much effect on children.⁸² For one thing, children under 12 years of age do not fully understand sexual terminology and sexual metaphors.^{83,84} If children cannot understand basic sexual concepts, it is unlikely that they will evidence much comprehension of profane language referring to sexual activities. Without such understanding, the impact of these terms on children's attitudes and behaviors is likely to be quite limited. The general lack of comprehension, however, does not preclude a child from inappropriately repeating a sexual profanity in a social context. Yet this type of imitation effect seems less harmful than a child imitating a character's violent actions.

Little research has been done on the exposure of children under 12 years of age to sexual depictions, but existing studies of children or teens exposed to scenes that imply sexual activity or contain partial nudity suggest that exposure to nonexplicit sexual images has little effect on young people's attitudes toward sex⁸⁵ or on their sexual behaviors.⁸⁶ The most pronounced effect seems to be an increased learning of sexual terminology.

For obvious ethical reasons, there are no studies of the impact of explicit sexual materials on young viewers. There are, however, numerous studies of the effects of such materials on adults. With few exceptions,⁸⁷ these experimental studies fail to find harmful effects on viewers' attitudes or behaviors.³⁷ In contrast to purely sexual movies, films that portray sexually violent images like rape consistently produce strong antisocial effects on adults.^{30,35,88} Documented harmful effects include increased callousness toward rape, negative evaluations of victims of sexual assault, and

increased aggression toward women in a laboratory setting. These findings are consistent with the U.S. Attorney General's conclusions about the effects of pornography which suggest that the level of violence in a film should be emphasized and not just the amount of sexual content.¹⁴

But a film does not have to be sexually explicit to contain violence against women. Two types of nonexplicit films have been identified as problematic: teenage slasher films which contain violence toward teenage girls in a sexual context (e.g., Friday the 13th and Texas Chainsaw Massacre) and R-rated materials that depict women as "consenting" to rape (e.g., The Getaway). Studies in which subjects have been exposed to content that is 1) sexually explicit and violent towards women, 2) sexually explicit but not violent, or 3) violent but not sexually explicit have indicated that materials containing violence against women in sexually nonexplicit (R-rated) contexts are capable of producing many of the same antisocial effects as do violent pornographic depictions.¹⁵

To summarize, most of the social science evidence suggests that profanity in movies results in less serious consequences to children than does violence. Nonexplicit sexual portrayals are far less harmful than either explicit or nonexplicit sexual depictions that also contain violence. The critical factor that produces antisocial effects is violence, not sexuality per se. The emphasis on profanity and nudity in rating films seems misplaced in light of this research.

A Modified Ratings System

In principle, parents need and want information about the nature and content of films, and often are frustrated when they do not have it. The current movie ratings system tries to provide parents with advance information. But the system is fundamentally flawed when examined in the context of social science research. Its emphasis on determining what is offensive to parents comes at the expense of what is arguably a more important question: what types of images are harmful to children? Many of the current, basic assumptions in rating films are inconsistent with social science evidence regarding harmful effects. Children under 13 years of age should be divided into more meaningful age groups, the contextual features of violence must be considered carefully when evaluating films, and profanity and sexuality are not necessarily more harmful than violence.

One option is to make minor adjustments to the current ratings system. This, however, would not necessarily result in a more informative system. Instead, more fundamental changes are needed. First, the Ratings Board should include not only parents, who bring a unique perspective to evaluating films, but also experts who are knowledgeable in child development and media effects research. The addition of people from the movie industry would help round out the representation of the board, ensuring that all perspectives are accounted for in evaluating films. Moreover, keeping filmmakers informed about social science research and about how films are rated might encourage more socially responsive filmmaking.

Second, the current age classifications should be augmented to include important periods of development during the preteen years. Most appropriate would be a three-category system that labels films according to the age group that is most likely to be adversely affected: 3 to 7 years of age, 8 to 12 years of age, and 13 to 17 years of age. Many European countries recognize the critical differences between younger and older children in their classifications of films. For

example, Denmark, Germany, Spain and Sweden all assess the appropriateness of films for children under versus over 6-7 years of age.⁴⁶

Third, the rating categories should be more informative to parents. One option is to label films in terms of the content that is deemed potentially harmful: "V" for violence, "S" for sexuality, "SV" for sexual violence, and "H" for graphic horror that is likely to frighten children.^{47 48} These ratings should not be based merely on what is offensive to adults, but instead on the types of content which have been documented by research as being harmful to children. Thus, a movie like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles would be rated "V: 3-7" indicating that it contains fantasy violence that is likely to be problematic for younger children. In contrast, Karate Kid might be labeled "V: 8-12" so as to warn parents that this type of film might be particularly problematic for older children because of the age of the featured character. This label would also mean that the film is unsuitable for younger children.

In addition to categories that actually reflect content, movie ratings could be supplemented by a brief description of the nature of the harmful content. In this case, an explanation could be offered not only about the type of content (violence or profanity or sex) that resulted in a specific rating of "PG," "PG-13," or "R," but also the contextual features of the harmful portrayal. For example, a rating for Home Alone 2 might include a description such as the following: "Contains numerous scenes of a young boy engaging in violent acts such as dropping bricks on a man's head, shooting a man's face with a staple gun, dropping a cast iron pipe on two men, and electrocuting a man. The violence looks very realistic but it is shown in a slapstick context and never results in serious injury." Many countries around the world provide detailed content descriptions of films along these lines to supplement their advisory ratings categories.⁴⁶

Fourth, the rating needs to be publicized widely and must be easily accessible to parents. Ratings could be published in newspaper advertisements for a film, in movie previews, and on all videocassette copies of films. Moreover, a similar ratings system could be employed for television. Currently, both cable television and the networks have responded to government pressure over entertainment violence by promising to develop an independent monitoring system to assess aggressive programming. Rather than creating numerous labeling schemes, one system could be used across different forms of mass media. This uniformity would greatly help parents to make informed decisions about media outlets and types of violent programming which are available to children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reduce violent behavior that may result from exposure to violent television and cable television programming and motion picture production, and to offer parents better information about the nature and content of media intended for their children, the Board of Trustees recommends that the following recommendations be adopted in lieu of Resolution 418 (A-93) and that the remainder of the report be filed:

1. That the AMA urge the entertainment industry to make fundamental changes in the rating system, which will give consumers more precise information about violent and sexual content of motion pictures, television and cable television programs, and other forms of video and audio entertainment, thereby enabling consumers to make more meaningful decisions for themselves and their children about what they view or hear;

- 1 2. That the AMA work with the entertainment industry and other groups interested in
2 reducing violent content of media programming, to incorporate age classifications into the
3 ratings system that reflect scientifically demonstrated developmental periods during
4 childhood and adolescence such as ages 3- to 7-year-olds, 8- to 12-year-olds, and 13- to
5 17-year-olds;
- 6 3. That the AMA urge the entertainment industry to develop a uniform ratings system that is
7 easy for consumers to understand and which can be applied across existing and future
8 entertainment technologies;
- 9 4. That the AMA urge physicians to counsel parents about the known effects of media
10 violence on children's behavior and encourage them to reduce the amount of violent
11 programming viewed by their children;
- 12 5. That the AMA monitor changes in the current ratings system and work through state
13 medical societies to inform physicians and their patients about these changes;
- 14 6. That the AMA urge consideration be given to the potential development of a Television
15 Violence Code, with input from the government, the television industry, and the public,
16 including the medical profession, to address issues relating to all television violence,
17 including news reports and entertainment;
- 18 7. That the AMA support all other appropriate measures to address and reduce television,
19 cable television, and motion picture violence.
- 20 8. That this report, along with its recommendations, be distributed widely to both
21 professional and lay audiences, particularly those groups that work with youth.
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STAFF NOTE

The AMA asked three experts in this field to write this report. Edward Donnerstein, PhD, Barbara Wilson, PhD, and Daniel Linz, PhD, all of the University of California, Santa Barbara. It has been reviewed by William Ayres, MD, a psychiatrist in private practice in San Mateo, California, and incoming president of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. Laurie Humphries, MD, a psychiatrist at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and Howard Spivak, MD, a pediatrician at the New England Medical Center in Boston. Staff support was provided by Janet E. Gans, PhD.

Mr. MARKEY. Let me first recognize the gentlelady from California.

Ms. SCHENK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lowenstein, your organization has proposed its own rating system, but I understand that the Software Publishers Association has selected a very different type of system. Can you tell us what you know about the differences?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. Yes. Very briefly, I think the software publishers have been pursuing a different model than the IDSA has. We have been in consultation with them, and I am hopeful that over the coming weeks we will be able to find common ground.

They have a position that there are some differences both in the technology and the developmental process of these products that need to be taken into account in developing a ratings system, and I am fairly hopeful that we will be able to find common ground with them to develop a uniform system that works for all platforms of software.

Ms. SCHENK. What kind of common ground?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. Well, the fundamental difference is our view has been that you need to set up an independent entity to rate the video games and the interactive software. The software publishers have, up until fairly recently, been of the view that a preferable system would be one in which publishers would be the ones who make decisions about the rating that would be appropriate for a product, subject subsequently to a review by an independent panel after the game was on the market. That is the fundamental difference.

We have been discussing with them our view of how the system ought to be structured, and, as I say, I think that there is a real potential for common ground on the issue of an independent entity. From our standpoint, from the IDSA's standpoint, we will not participate and cannot work with a system that does not create a substantial level of independence and independent rating so that the decisions as to what a product ought to be are made outside of the industry and by independent, third-party raters.

Ms. SCHENK. You heard Dr. McAfee's description of the AMA's proposal. What is your opinion of that?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. As I said in my testimony, the system we are designing is very much a work in progress. We have been in consultation with numerous outside parties, experts, child development experts, educators, as well as people in the industry to try to do this right. So, I am a little reluctant at this point to publicly go into the details of the system and how it will finally look because I don't know exactly how it will finally look at this point.

Certainly, we will be happy to come back and meet with you and others to explore that with you, hopefully within the next few weeks.

Ms. SCHENK. I didn't ask what it would finally look like. I asked what your opinion was of what you heard of the AMA's proposal.

And I think Ms. Kelly touched on that drawing greater distinctions between the age categories and the children, from what 2 and 3-year-olds can absorb and understand versus what a 5 and 6-year-old can absorb and understand.

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. We certainly are aware of those issues and those concerns. In the literature, Dr. Pober, who is the person that we—who is putting together the ratings system, is a child development expert on his own. And it is certainly an area that we are looking at as we try to—as Dr. Pober tries to structure the categories. So I think it is something that is very much an open question.

Ms. SCHENK. Mr. Thomas, would you please respond to this—would Sega be open to the kinds of recommendations that you heard Dr. McAfee make?

Mr. THOMAS. The Sega Channel is looking to the industry association to provide the kind of guidance it needs in order to make decisions. I would take a minute to really congratulate Sega America for having any ratings system available. When we started putting our games together for the channel on a test basis, that was the only ratings system available to us. So we think that the association's exploration of what would be the most judicious system is one that we ardently support and will defer at this point to their judgment as to what makes the most sense.

I am not a child expert. I would say that, in general, our system would provide for a fairly lengthy description of whatever system existed so that if the system or the game required a fairly articulate description of what the problems were or the areas of concern were, we would be capable of doing that.

Ms. SCHENK. I might say, I don't share your view about congratulations. I think that is probably just basic common decency of what business ought to be doing. I think it is not something that we would want to congratulate. If we do, that is a sad commentary.

Mr. THOMAS. I only meant that in the terms of context that there was nothing else there and that they had voluntarily initiated the process, which I think will reach fruition with the association's work.

Ms. SCHENK. Dr. McAfee, thank you again for coming before us, and I want to congratulate you on the work that you do and the issue that you have taken up which is, in my view, going to lend a very important element of support to what we need to do collectively to finally address this issue of violence in America.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. You have heard the testimony of Mr. Lowenstein. Where do you think this is going? Do you think that this particular path is the right one?

Mr. MCAFEE. Well, certainly, it is in the right direction, and I would be remiss if I didn't point that out that it is better than what we have had in the past. But it seems that what we are asking for is relatively simple acceptance of something that is uniform in our society.

As a parent, I would have difficulty remembering what the video game violence system is versus the motion picture versus something new that the television industry—at least the four networks—have agreed to do and what the cable industry may do in addition to that. I would have no way to give guidance to my children and grandchildren, given the hodgepodge.

Why can't we do this simple thing that we are asking for? If you take those very precious preventive dollars that are available to us in this country to prevent violence and prevent children growing up

in this society from growing up in a society in which violence without pain, violence without retribution or punishment and violence with humor is so ingrained in our society—

Those wiser than I say we should not spend any preventive dollars on someone over the age of seven. We should focus on selection of nonviolent conflict resolution in our society. And, given that, I think that the focus that we are asking for is bring this down to that level in which those children who are exposed to the products we have heard about today, despite attempts by others to program it out, continue to foster violence as a way of life in our society and, given that, we think our request is a relatively simple one.

We would hope that individuals such as was mentioned by Mr. Lowenstein who carry expertise in child development would have a say in the ratings system. We would desperately hope that our current motion picture rating system, which does not include anyone with any kind of expertise in that, would be part of the CARA program which puts G and PG and everything else on those programs.

A 4-year-old watching Bambi has a totally different perspective than one who is 8. Can you remember the very first time you saw that as a youngster when Bambi's mother died? That was a profound, terrifying moment in your life. For those age 8, it was easier.

This is not to say that 4-year-olds should not see Bambi. What I am saying is if one looks in our written testimony as to how Home Alone II is described, a young boy hitting a man in the head with a brick and burning him and electrocuting him and doing other things—it is the contextual rating that we are looking for.

We are not experts. We are physicians. But we see the victims of violence. We are seeing more than we ought to see, and we expect we are going to see more next year. And, as a consequence, prevention to us is where this needs to be.

And I think the industry that is before you today has made some overtures in beginning to help us parent better. But I hope it can be simplified so that any parent, regardless of their understanding of the problem, will be able to direct their children from this point on.

Ms. SCHENK. Ms. Kelly. How do we coordinate our efforts to get a uniform and simplified rating system so that any harried, average mother, father, grandmother or grandfather can very quickly and simply impose the kind of standards on their children that they would like to?

Ms. KELLY. Well, as I said in my testimony, I think that the best of all worlds would be if we could have a uniform system across all of our media outlets. Australia has moved in that direction.

We are working right now—as a matter of fact, I referenced a study that we issued last year which was the first-ever study done on ratings around the world. That was released last July. Since then, there has been so much activity in ratings in this country and overseas that our publication is already out of date, and we are working on a second volume on that and hope to have that out in a couple of months.

I think that there are several issues here that you are—we are trying to ask within each industry, very competitive industries, all

of them, to certainly work together on something when they traditionally don't work together.

We would like the network and cable to work together. We would like all of the various video game people to work together. And they are competitors so the problem is how do we get them all to come to the table and put all of that aside and work out a common rating system?

I don't think it is going to be easy. I think it is doable, but I don't think it is going to be easy. And I think it will probably take a third party outside of all of their arenas to pull them—first of all, they have to have the incentive. And, second, I think there will have to be a third party. I doubt that should be a governmental agency but perhaps some nonprofit or foundation or something of that sort that could pull them together and maybe have them begin to look at this.

Ms. SCHENK. Mr. Chairman, thank you. I have no further questions.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you.

So the issue then comes to what kind of blocking technologies we should have available to parents. Every time I listen to Dr. McAfee I realize how important it is for us to give that protection to children in their formative years.

Congressman Lantos made the point that he would not let his small grandchildren have access even to Schindler's List, as strongly as he believes that teenagers should see it.

How do we give the parents who have responsibility for monitoring their children in a video era, where the child might be watching it 6 hours a day and the parent might be watching it 6 hours a month—how do we give that parent the ability to, one, block and, two, have some uniform system that they utilize in order to make sure that violence is out of their home, beyond a certain level, where they have determined it is appropriate for their child to see it?

Now, the argument is made to us that it will block children from seeing a lot of things which they should see according to some producer in New York that thinks that they should see *The Burning Bed* or *Schindler's List*. They are going to determine when children should see a violent program, and it is going to come through into the home, and it is up to the parents to deal with it if they didn't happen to be home when the child saw it.

The argument on the other side is that it is nobody's business in Hollywood or New York when a child sees something. It is up to the parent, and they should have exclusive responsibility for deciding when a child should be exposed to any one of these video images, given the developmental stage of that particular child. And it is that tension that we are mediating here.

Many in the creative industry call it censorship, believe it or not, when the parent keeps that kind of information out of their home, and they feel it crosses dangerously into the territory of "Big Brother." As a matter of fact, some would even object to this hearing taking place as being an unwarranted intrusion into the First Amendment rights of executives who live in New York City and Hollywood, creating their product and sending it out into the minds of 250 million Americans.

The question is, Mr. Thomas, does it make sense for us to have blocking technologies available for all parents, with some uniform ratings system that will allow them to make determinations as to what is appropriate for their children?

Mr. THOMAS. Well, certainly, Mr. Chairman, we at Sega Channel have felt that, given the fact that we are going to be a service that will provide games and entertainment and information across a full range of people, from older—as a matter of fact, I have a card in my briefcase from one of our subscribers in Charleston who is a woman of 70 years old.

I also think, Mr. Chairman, if you could let Congressman Lantos know that we are going to have chess on Sega Channel, too. But because we are running a full panoply of games, we felt that there was some efficacy of establishing a process by which a parent could make a judgment. We felt strongly that we should be in a position where we can provide games that stretch from chess to Barney. And so, consequently, we made a decision.

I think we were also advantaged by the fact that the technology that we were utilizing was an adapter which had to be inserted in the Genesis machine so we could design a system that worked. So we had some advantages, but we unequivocally felt that since we were providing a service that was going to be attractive to all ages that we needed some method of segmenting it and giving a parent the opportunity to make some decision as to what programs their children would watch.

Mr. MARKEY. Do you feel that an industry has responsibility to provide a mother or a father with the blocking technology to protect their child as they provide this violent programming to the marketplace?

Mr. THOMAS. Well, I certainly felt it was appropriate in the video game industry. I obviously would defer to the judgments of people who have a more day-to-day responsibility in other industries. But I do think that when you are providing services that do cut across various age groups that you should, in our instance certainly, have the opportunity make those decisions.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Lowenstein, how do you feel about that?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. Well, as I said in my time, IDSA at this point is a new organization and we are just getting our feet wet on some of these issues. We have got our hands full with the ratings system which is where I think it all starts. You need to create a system that provides the information and creates the basis to do any kind of blocking technology in the first instance.

As to the IDSA and the issue of our member company's positions on blocking technology, I think that is something that we just haven't visited yet as an organization but we will certainly take up with them and get back to you and give you some sense.

Mr. MARKEY. Well you have made progress, Mr. Lowenstein, and you, Mr. Thomas, in the last 6 months towards reaching some early consensus, not final, on the kinds of protections which should be given to parents.

We were confronted on this subcommittee with the dilemma of passing legislation on the Floor of Congress on Tuesday which is going to rapidly encourage all industries to develop the 500 channel universe. That is what that bill was on Tuesday.

We think there is a communicopia in the most optimistic and positive vision of what this will produce.

But there is another side, too—the exploitation, the pandering, that will come from certain segments of the creative community as well. So as the Sega Channel or as any of these software interactive providers, along with broadcasters and along with the rest of the cable business and along with God knows who out there who will try to take advantage of this 500-channel universe, we need some mechanism that we can hand over to the mother so that she can protect her children at age 6, 7 and 8 from the images which she thinks are not appropriate.

And that is what we are getting at here. We have multiple stories that are occurring but only one mechanism to block in a uniform way. Parents need to know that there is nothing coming in, unless they bought their kid the game down at the store. But there is no 7 or 8-year-old going into a video store. There may be, but it is 1 out of 1,000. It is not the typical child.

So we are looking, in other words, for help. Because I think that Dr. McAfee continues to make the case that it is irresponsible on our society's part to not afford parents that power and at same time allow you guys to make money.

Ten percent of the trade deficit with Japan is a pretty good start. Just how much do we allow broadcasters or you or anyone else to then exploit the child market to get an extra 5 percent? What price does a society pay for us to turn a blind eye to that extra 5 percent that somebody was going to try to squeeze out of the adolescent marketplace?

Mr. Lowenstein?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. What I think I have tried to say here is that every member of our association believes that you must give parents the information to make intelligent decisions about what their children see. That is the essence of a ratings system. That is what we believe in. And that information has to be credible and reliable.

That is where we start. That gets us to a ratings system. It gets us to putting in place an aggressive, proactive public education and consumer education program to make sure that parents who go to the stores—

And you are absolutely correct. Seven-year-old kids are not dropping \$69 at Toys Are Us to buy a video game. It is usually a parental or other caregiver's decision. And their kids are there and are saying I want this or that, and the parent often don't have a clue what it is.

So you need to give them the tools to say yes and no and make some appropriate decisions about what is there. And so we are committed to that, and we are committed and have been working with retailers to make sure that they can put in place an effective way to enforce the system. That is where we start.

When you get to technological fixes, Sega Channel obviously has made a commitment, and it suggests that the technology at least through the set is available. As far as I know, none of our other members are planning on delivering their product as Sega is planning on delivering their product through the television. But certainly to the extent that they are I think that all of them would look proactively at a technology comparable or similar.

I simply can't commit on the part of the industry as to what and how individual companies will do. But it is a natural extension of the concept of providing people with information.

Mr. MARKEY. But, you understand, they are just the beginning. They are very wise to move early to this particular field because the ease with which someone can circumvent the \$69 trip down to a video store is going to become immediately apparent to most families. And, as a result, we will see a migration of business over to these transmission systems.

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. I think one of the reasons this industry formed an association was the recognition that the technology and the growth of the industry was such that it needed to have a place to deal with a lot of these issues. And you are absolutely right. The technology is moving forward with dizzying speed, and it is very difficult to sit here today and predict what will be out there a year from now, both in terms of product and in terms of technology of how it is delivered.

Mr. MARKEY. By the end of this year, we are going to let telephone companies into this business. And they are just the 7 regional companies, 7 of the 30 largest companies in the United States with cash to burn and companies to buy, products to sell on this second information highway that they are going to be providing into every single home as well.

And so 2 and 3 and 4 years down the line, should we not anticipate that with all of these extra channels that will be in the marketplace that there will be a need for some blocking technology? And would it not be wise for us to build in the requirement for that blocking technology now so that it will be there upon the arrival of all of these products? Or do we have to pretend ignorance of what the consequences are and believe that Mr. Thomas's company is just an anomaly here and does not really represent the future, which I think is not the case?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. I agree with your premise that we are moving into an era of a new form of distribution and a wider form of distribution, and it is going to raise some of the public policy—it already is raising some of the public policy questions that you are raising, and it is an area that our industry needs to address.

I am simply saying that as an organization that has existed for barely 2 months it is not an issue that we have put front and center on our agenda right now, but it is certainly one that I will take back to the association.

Mr. MARKEY. Do you think it is a first amendment violation of the industries that we are talking about, cable, broadcasting, satellite or software games? Do you think it is a violation of your first amendment rights if the Congress mandates or the electronics industry of America adopts blocking technology that parents can use on an individual basis to determine what is appropriate for their children?

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. I wish I could answer that. I am not a constitutional lawyer so I really don't feel competent to give you a legal opinion on the constitutionality of blocking legislation.

Mr. MARKEY. Do you have a view on that, Mr. Thomas?

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Chairman, I might say that one of the things is that Sega Channel will conceivably be available from some Bell

operating companies who are doing different kinds of demonstration programs and have been asked to distribute, and they will be under the same requirement in terms of provisions of the service that the cable companies are under.

Not to avoid answering your question, but I think that the industries involved have a responsibility to analyze what is the most effective way to deal with this issue. And I think that all of them are sensitive, I think increasingly sensitive to the problem.

I think we were in the position where, as I say, we were a new company in a relatively new media, and initiating this from the beginning was relatively easy, particularly since with Sega we had a company that thought this was the—that this was a very effective thing to do.

So, I think—in answer to your question, I would say we feel it is right for our particular industry, for our particular product. But I would not be so bold to tell other industries what they should do or whether it does or doesn't affect the first amendment.

Mr. MARKEY. Dr. McAfee.

Mr. MCAFEE. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I was going to make the observation that I think we are about at the point where programming involving violence in the home is quite close to the tobacco problem in the sidestream smoke issue that we had a few years ago.

The—once the studies—once the scientists told us that the freedom to smoke was now impacting on the health of those who do not smoke merely by exposure to that cigarette by-product, then the freedoms that seemed to exist and the argument to smoke were seriously jeopardized. And from that point on, through regulation, through voluntarily effort, through others, we have seen a diminution of smoking and rules regarding that in this country.

I think the same can be said for violence. There is no question that in what form media presents violence to us, the longitudinal studies indicate that this is a close-related phenomenon for young people who are acting out violent behavior grossly proportional to what they have received as a youngster.

Given that and given the fact that the first amendment always has exceptions such as you can't holler fire in a crowded theater, that we have, I think, a right to continue to take the route that we are taking provided it does not seriously jeopardize the industry's basic freedoms as we would all wish to protect.

I would also make the observation that we hope to widely disseminate this report that we passed just 2 weeks ago. We open that to the industry and to television and motion pictures and to the video industry that they seriously read our, I think, very scientific report with some 90 bibliographic references in this.

And at that point if we don't sense that there is—or if we do sense that there is some reason to agree, then perhaps within the private sector organizations even such as ours might convene in a nonconfrontational open session representatives from those industries to see if we can't more simplify and arrive at what we are all asking for.

I think if we are unable to do that in the private sector in a non-regulatory, noncensuring, noncensorship milieu, then I am afraid we will have to appeal to you to help us address this problem.

Mr. MARKEY. I think our problem, Doctor, is that we don't receive the level of support that we would like from the private sector.

I, for example, would like the electronic industry to just build in the violence chip into each new television set built down the line, and then parents can put pressure on the industry to send ratings that parents could use. But you can see in my conversation with Mr. Lowenstein that I quickly hit a brick wall.

Is the on/off button on the television set a first amendment violation of parents' rights to keep that program out of their house? Is the channel switcher a violation of the first amendment rights of producers as parents can keep shows that they don't want in their family room out because they switch the channel?

Then you say, what if they could keep out all violent programs? I don't know about that but, God, it gets complicated, you know, keeping out programs that way, and we haven't thought about it. And we might have to litigate that question, you know.

And so, at that juncture, if that is going to be the attitude, then you say maybe it is going to be necessary for us to escalate because the dialogue ends at a certain point with commercial interests over-riding.

This is not really a debate over—in my opinion—the first amendment. It is a debate over commerce. It is a debate over their right to make that final 5 percent or 10 percent exploiting the marketplace.

We had the same problem with the children's TV discussion that we had with the broadcasters. We kept saying we don't want to pass the Children's Television Act. It puts limits on how much advertising you can put on each children's program.

But you always had 20 percent or 30 percent that were outliers. They would never come in under any guidelines, and they were doing 17, 18, 19 minutes of commercials an hour on Saturday morning, and we had to limit it to 12 minutes an hour to keep a remote balance with what programming was supposed to be.

And I think we are going to reach that point, I hate to say it, in that discussion as well. Because there is just too strong a commercial drive on the parts of too many in this industry and too easy an escape to the first amendment.

Let me go back to you, Ms. Schenk.

Ms. SCHENK. No, I absolutely agree. I just, frankly, if I could ask Dr. McAfee a couple of more questions, I am very excited about what the AMA can do in partnership with us. Where would you like to be at the end of your presidential tenure with this issue?

Mr. MCAFEE. With this issue, if I could arrive at some consensus within the industry that our concerns, as exemplified in this report, are serious and will be adopted in some rather simplified ratings system, then I think we will have accomplished a great deal, a system that is uniform across the different kinds of media that we are discussing today.

I think with particular reference on young people in our society, because that is where the ratings, the blocking, the lack of violence or the exposure to violence is so critically important.

Ms. SCHENK. I don't want you to give away your strategy, but, if you can, do you intend to engage your membership at the grass-roots level, so to speak, and get them involved?

Mr. MCAFEE. This is part of our entire antiviolence, family violence initiative which involves such things as domestic violence, as you know. In fact, we have a hearing this morning downtown at the Press Club on a new public service announcement on domestic violence.

We are concerned about elderly abuse and so many of the other things that add to the violence in our country. We are the most violent country on the face of the earth. America is at war with itself, and as physicians we see the results of this violence. And it strikes us as so wrong that, by the time gets to us, there is little that we can do to prevent it. We need to redirect our efforts in this society, and that is why the opportunity to be with you today was so meaningful to me.

Last year, 220 days I spent on the road for AMA. Forty percent of my time was in requests to meet—information or speaking engagements involving violence at a time when we are looking at health system reform, the greatest impact we have had on our profession in the last 50 years.

But I can tell you the tempo is right. And there are, I think, increasing teachable moments, Mr. Chairman, that you may find more response from the industry than perhaps in the past in meeting some of these requests.

We don't look upon this as a terribly expensive, difficult request. It is there. And I can't believe that the people sitting next to me at this table would adopt a position that is opposed to providing parents and subsequently children with the information we are asking for in order to selectively view and utilize their products.

Ms. SCHENK. Just in talking with constituents, friends, families, mothers, fathers, there is such enormous frustration out there amongst people with the issue of violence and all of the categories that you touched on, but particularly as it impacts children.

And we are more and more an isolated society. We don't act as a community. There are very few town hall meetings, except maybe in Maine or Vermont, where people come together.

And they seem to have one connection, and that is with their family physician, the doctor, the pediatrician. And so I think that is a vehicle that is of particular and unusual importance in this battle. And I do see it as a battle. And I am not surprised at what you have encountered because I encounter the same thing when I speak at home with the average people of the community.

Mr. MCAFEE. It is a problem that crosses every specialty line and every physician in every part of this country. There are more years of life lost to violence cumulatively in our society than years of life lost to heart disease, cancer and stoke combined. That is a figure alone that could drive every physician to say if I can make a difference in allowing that 15- and 20-year-old child to live a lifetime, that will make up for the few years we are able to extend the quality of life in people who have malignant disease and serious heart disease, et cetera.

The challenge is there for us, but it is as much a societal challenge involving issues such as media violence as well as it is in guns, the home, and many other aspects of our society.

Ms. SCHENK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you.

The broadcast industry yesterday announced a plan to conduct an annual report on violence on their networks. And that is a very positive step, but an annual report does not help parents control the day-to-day access to violence in the video marketplace, which millions of parents, I am certain, would welcome.

The television set manufacturers are also prepared to participate in providing parents with the ability to block violent programs. They are hoping to build into TV sets the violence chip blocking capability that has been proposed by this subcommittee, and we are hoping that takes place.

Our problem is that as the video game and software manufacturing industry makes progress, as the cable industry embraces the need to have these guidelines, as the satellite industry builds in blocking technology into their new services, we still have the broadcasting industry unwilling to provide that technological block for parents.

And it is of very great concern to me and I think most members on this subcommittee because in this country, 78 percent of all viewing is still of free, over-the-air broadcasting. Twenty-two percent is cable. But 78 percent of the families in this country have their TV set for the free, over-the-air broadcast channels all day long. And there is no block, and there is no protection. And we need to ensure that we have a coordinated attack here because, as good as the efforts have been now by some industries in responding, those sitting at this table are amongst them, we cannot allow the broadcasters to be excluded.

Let me ask each you if you could to give us a one-minute summation, and you could let us know what you want us to remember as we go through this process.

Ms. Kelly, can you give us a one-minute summation of what you want us to remember?

Ms. KELLY. What I would want you to remember?

Well, I think just to reiterate what I said is that the technology will only be good as the ratings system that utilizes it. And I guess from our study of that I would just like to reiterate the points that we made on the ratings systems should be based on—or the various symbols and designations should be based on scientific evidence.

We need to look at the various child development stages, that we need to make sure that we have the right expertise that is involved in the process, and that it is—that there is public accountability for such a system.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you.

Mr. Thomas.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Chairman, I think that your activities and your leadership of this committee have, I think, struck a very significant chord among a number of industries, not just the video game industry but others.

I think what we have done so far, at least with the channel and the new association, has been to begin the process of recognizing what I think we all know, particularly because we are also parents, that this is indeed a very critical question and that things need to be done.

I think the industry in general, what we have done has been voluntary. I think other elements of the society will move forward. I don't think there is a necessity, necessarily, for legislation. I do think, though, that constantly reminding us and showing us that things need to be done is an important way to approach this. And I think that there is increasingly a responsiveness.

Events of recent days and recent weeks have brought us to the terrible problem that we have in our society. Dr. McAfee said we are the most violent society in the world, and I think we are moving ahead on this, and I think here you see people who are a vanguard of others that will also participate in this.

So my last comment—and I think we are moving ahead. I think it is not nearly so swiftly as some of us might think, but progress is being made, and I think our channel is an example of that kind of progress.

Mr. MARKEY. Dr. McAfee.

Mr. MCAFEE. I think, Mr. Chairman, that the most effective place to minimize future violence in our society is the home situation where parents can provide their children with a nurturing environment in what is acceptable and nonacceptable behavior. Anything we can do to further the ability of parents to parent will pay off in so many great dividends down the road.

What we are asking for are not optimal, achievable standards but a set of minimum, easily understood standards of a ratings system that will allow parents to do that parenting. I think, given that, we will have accomplished a great deal in terms of the future and in terms of the present.

I think if everyone involved in the media would have the same perception that not only would they allow their 4-year-old child or grandchild to witness what they have produced but would be proud to have them see the programming, the games, et cetera, that they produce, then I would feel better about our accomplishment.

I congratulate you for your committee's accomplishment last Tuesday.

Mr. LOWENSTEIN. I would say several things: one, that this industry is committed to providing useful information to consumers.

Two, that we are committed to regularly revisiting the structure and process that we have set up to make sure that it achieves that goal and not just today, but a year from now, 2 years from now as technology changes. This is a system that is not a static system that we are setting up.

Three, we are committed to an independent system. I think that is critical.

Four, that we are committed, as I indicated in my testimony, to consulting with outsiders as we design the system, and we are committed to going forward, to having a process and a structure with outsiders. Advisors are advising the ratings board over the course of time on the nature of the system and whether it is achieving what it is designed to do.

And, finally, I want to just leave you on the issue of technology. Quite the contrary to suggesting that I threw up a brick wall, I think what I would like you to take with respect to this industry is that we are just visiting some of these issues now for the first time that you raised, and I prefer to look at our entry to this issue as the entry of a dialogue rather than the end of a discussion.

Mr. MARKEY. That is very fair, Mr. Lowenstein, and I take it as an invitation to work you with to resolve these issues.

We are going to focus upon these issues, having completed our House of Representatives' consideration of the information super-highway legislation and passed it over to the Senate. We now have some time to focus upon these issues once again, and we want to work with all of you towards the goal of dealing with this medical epidemic that Dr. McAfee warns us about and the need for us to intervene at very early stages to change behavioral patterns. I think if we ignore it, we ignore it at our own societal peril.

This subcommittee has the job to make sure that we can say that we tried—that we really tried to give parents the tools which they needed to give their children the protections against the worst elements in our society that would exploit children as just another market and without regard for the long-term consequences for our country. We thank each of you.

[Whereupon, at 10:56 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]



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